

MAANICKAVAACAGAR

POET AND MYSTIC

An original interpretation

of

The Tiruvaacagam

by

G. VANMIKANATHAN

Published by

The Tirukkural Prachar Sangh

3. Annamalaipuram, Tennur, Tiruchirapalli-17

TAMILNADU, INDIA.

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First Edition, April 1970, 1000 copies.

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(under preparation; likely publication date, April - May 1971)

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Postage by V. P. P. Rs. 1/10

Copies can be had from :

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Organiser

Tirukkural Prachar Sangh

3. Annamalaipuram, Tennur,

Tiruchirapalli-17. Tamilnadu, India.

Price Rs. 2/-

Ordinary postage under certificate of posting 25 p.

Postage by V. P. P. Rs. 1/25.

PREFACE

The Newman Association of the St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirapalli asked me to give three talks on the Saiva Siddhaanthaa. I pleaded my ignorance of the subject, but offered to speak on *The Tiruvaacagam* under the title, 'Maanickavaacagar - Poët and Mystic'. They agreed, and I gave the talks in November 1969. This booklet is a revision of those talks to suit the needs of a printed book. I am very grateful to the President and Secretaries of the Newman Association for giving me this opportunity to put my meditations of many years into words. My interpretation of *The Tiruvaacagam* is based primarily on the instruction given me in the work at great pains and with great love by my revered guru Sri V. Subbarayar of Bombay on practically all Sundays and holidays in the years 1951 to 1955. I reverently dedicate this work to him with humility and gratitude.

I offer my heart-felt thanks to the unknown donor and my dear friend Professor R. Radhakrishnan, the vehicle for the donation, who have made the printing of this book possible.

I am indebted to Dr V. A. Devasenapathi M. A., Ph. D., Professor of Philosophy, University of Madras, for giving a learned Foreword to this book at short notice. Mrs. Ratna Navaratnam and Tiruvaacagamani K. M. Balasubramaniam have claims on my gratitude for the valuable opinions they have given about this book.

I am grateful to the Jothi Printers, for their cooperation and help in bringing out this book.

I am now engaged in preparing an interpretative rendering of the entire *Tiruvaaacegam* into English. With God's grace, it is hoped that this work may be published in early 1971. May God, in his grace, grant me health and life to complete this work. A translation of the 1st decad, *The Civapuraanam*, which appears at the end of this book will serve as a sample.

Readers who are interested in the work are requested to book *their copies* in advance by sending Rs. 10/- (Ten) only at once by money order to me. If sent by cheque, Re. 1/- should be added. This advance booking has an element of a novel gift plan in it, a gift plan of spiritual value and, unlike any other gift plan, you will be an instrument of giving and not a vessel for receiving. This advance booking is open only to end of August of this year. Only those who are genuinely interested in matters spiritual and *are eager to co-operate with us in sharing with others the benefits of this great mystical book* need send the money.

Tamil New Year's Day, 1970.

G. Vanmikanathan.

Foreword

Maanickavaacagar's *Tiruvaacagam* is a classic of mystical literature. Commentators help us to appreciate its beauties from various angles. In the present work, we have a valuable interpretation from the pen of Mr. G Vanmikanathan who has made a close study of two other Tamil classics—*The Tirukkural* and the *Kamba Raamaayanam* and also of the mystic literature of other countries. We see here not only the stamp of his scholarship but also something more important for writing a commentary on a mystical work—the ability to enter into the spirit of the work.

The author says that he has built his interpretation round the definitions and descriptions of various types and stages of contemplation given by Thomas Merton, a distinguished Roman Catholic thinker of this century (p. 58).

The author reminds us that the path of love spoken of by the mystics the world over is one familiar to the Tamils from the days of the *Tolkaappiyam*, *Irayanaar Ahapporul* and the *Tirukkural* (p. 33). Thus, for example, he gives a link-up of the *Tiruvempaavai* (in *The Tiruvaacagam*) with a couplet in *The Tirukkural* (p. 38). The girl who is said to be asleep is enjoying the bliss of union with her lover. Waking is unwelcome to her because the lover in her arms would hurriedly become a lover in her heart. The author says that the entire *Tiruvaacagam* is Maanickavaacagar's plea for admission to the assembly of devotees (p. 69). In other words, Maanickavaacagar, the great lover of God, longs to be in the company of other lovers of God. The author helps us to realise the uniqueness of spiritual love. The spiritual lover is not jealous of other lovers. He ardently desires that their company should grow from strength to strength.

In commenting on the line, 'what service You demand, that we shall offer', the author observes: "True love always humbles itself in victory for love is service." This is another distinguishing mark of spiritual love.

The author skilfully selects some decads of *The Tiruvaacagam* to build up a narrative of the love of Maanickavaacagar, the *talaivi* for *Civan*, the *talaivan*. The phases, from falling in love on hearing the blessed name to the happy consummation, are presented against the background of *ahapporul*. We are reminded of Appar's *Munnam avanudaiya naamam kettal*¹. The author also deals with various other aspects and steps of mystic experience

The quotation on pages 9 and 10 from Ka'hil Gibran reminds us of Maanickavaacagar's *adittu adittu akkaaram mun theettiya arputam ariyene*,² and Appar's *nin pani pizhaikkil puliyam vilaaraal moduvippaai*³. Maanickavaacagar helps us to understand this process of soul culture by his phrase *ennai valarppavane*⁴.

I welcome this work which, within its short compass of one hundred and two pages, provides valuable insights to understand and appreciate Maanickavaacagar's *Tiruvaacagam*. May the Lord bless Mr. Vanmikanathan to continue his noble service in the cause of spiritual literature.

Madras,
7-4-1970 }

V. A. Devasenapathi.

1. Firstly, she heard His name.

2. I did not realise the miracle when of yore He slapped and slapped me and fed me ambrosia.

3. If I default in service to You, do thrash me with the switch of the tamarind tree.

4. Oh You who rears me!

BENEDICTION

Sri-la-sri V. Subbarayar of Matunga, Bombay, my revered guru, graciously says :

My esteemed and devoted friend Sri G. Vanmikanathan, whom I regard as my soul's companion, has drunk deeply and fully the sacred waters of the fountain called *The Tiruvaacagam*. Knowing him as I do for nearly twenty years, I find it a great pleasure and privilege to have the opportunity to study his booklet on Sri Maanicka-vaacagar as a poet and mystic and his original interpretation of *The Tiruvaacagam*. The author being a close and devoted friend of mine, I feel a bit embarrassed to indulge in words of praise and admiration of his successful and laudable attempt.

The sacred hymns have been interpreted from several angles. Being divine inspired songs, the hymns are capable of being interpreted according to the scholarship and the spiritual outlook and attainment of the commentator. A scholar of the Upanishads will hold the book as advocating the path of knowledge and that the hymns reveal self-realisation and *aatma anubhavaa*. A deep and daily study of the hymns and a constant reflection on them, however, will undoubtedly lead one to feel that the songs reveal a feeling of spontaneous and harmonious love - a Love Divine between the saint and his Creator. To establish that this aspect is real and natural, and to drive home this truth, is the sole aim of this small book in English. I dare say that the learned and scholarly author has really succeeded in achieving his object. His English rendering is very faithful to the original Tamil text, and no less inspiring. It reveals a happy appreciation

of the spirit of the great immortal poet and mystic, Sri Maanickavaacaga Swamy.

The comments and translations on pages 47, 57, 71, 72 & 73 are really illuminating and worth constant study and reflection by the readers. The renderings in English are no less inspiring than the Tamil original.

Last but not least important is my friend's attempt to give a full rendering of and commentary on the first sacred hymn, the *Civapuraanam*. It is simply inspiring, illuminating and soul-stirring.

My humble prayers to the Almighty to bestow on him good and sound health and to bless him to continue further in similar noble attempts.

MAANICKAVAACAGAR

Poet and Mystic

Maanickavaacagar is said to have been born in Vaadhavoor in a brahmin family which had, for several generations, provided the kings of Paandiyanaadu with ministers, so much so that the family (Kulam) was called *amaathiya kulam* (the ministerial family). He was named, tradition says, Vaadhavooran.

It is now generally accepted that Maanickavaacagar lived before St. Tirunaavukkarasar. The late Maraimalai Adigal places Maanickavaacagar in the third century A. D. However, his date is immaterial to our purpose. Like the life of many a saint in India and elsewhere too, the life of our saint too is enveloped in a web of fable and legend.

True to his family tradition, Maanickavaacagar became very learned in the religious and secular fields. His fame reached the then ruling Paandiyana King who promptly made him, who was not yet out of his teens, a minister of the kingdom.

On one occasion, the king sent Maanickavaacagar to buy horses for the cavalry. On the way, Maanickavaacagar heard of a great saint camped at a place called Perunthurai, and went to pay him his respects. Shall we say that this was his undoing? Yes, undoing as a minister of the Paandiyana King; but no, as far as his spiritual life was concerned. That was the day on which, through the rays of the benign glance of the saint, the strands of the bonds which secured Maanickavaacagar to the unceasing cycle of births began to be burnt away. He forgot the king's

mission, forgot his position, his duty and responsibility, forgot himself completely and began to squander the money which the king had given him for the purchase of horses on the reconstruction of the temple of the place. Word reached the king of the vagaries of Maanickavaacagar, and he promptly recalled him to court. Maanickavaacagar woke to the rude realities of his plight and appealed to the saint who had by now initiated him into the spiritual life and had become his *Guru*. The *Guru* reassured him and bade him go and tell the king that the horses will come in a day or two. Maanickavaacagar did so, and here began the long trail of the deliverance of Maanickavaacagar, deliverance from the bonds of worldly affairs, deliverance from the bonds of me and mine, and ultimately deliverance from the bonds of birth. Let us leave Maanickavaacagar facing the irate king and turn to the saint who walked into his life at Perunthurai and took possession of him, body and soul and belongings as well. Later, in a moment of travail, he was to sing thus :

Oh Lord, eternal like a hill !

On that very day when You enslaved me,

Did you not take possession of my soul, body and belongings,

Everything indeed ? Oh Lord with eight shoulders and three eyes !

Can anything stand in my way today ?

Do You good, do You ill ;

Have I mastery over this ?

In Saiva Siddhaantaa theology, God is never born through the womb of a woman, but He often materialises out of the ether in a human form in order to help His devotees, and disappears as soon as His mission is over. Thus He often comes as a *guru*. The word '*guru*' has no equivalent in English. The word means one who leads a person out of darkness. The words '*preceptor*', '*instructor*',

'director of souls', all these fall far short of the image which the word '*guru*' evokes in the mind of a reader of the Hindu scriptures. The *guru* is indeed next to God, nay, often equal to God in the spiritual life of a *mumukshu*, an aspirant for the attainment of the Godhead. In Hindu tradition, God Himself often comes down as a *guru* to claim a soul. He comes when the particular soul has attained a state of spiritual maturity which is called '*malaparipaakam*' or '*vinai-oppu*', a state of fitness for the grace of God to descend on the soul. The saint who came to Perunthurai for the sake of claiming the soul of Maanickavaacagar was God Himself. Maanickavaacagar affirms this in no uncertain terms in lines 55 to 64 of decad 3. He sings :

Behold the Lord whom everyone is entitled to apprehend !
 Behold Civan whom even the *devaas* do not know!
 Behold Him with the aspects of male, female and the neuter!
 Behold Him whom even I saw with my eyes !
 Behold the Ambrosia which yields grace in abundance !
 Note that I saw the (Embodiment of the) greatness of mercy !
 Note that I touched His rosy feet here on earth !
 Note that I was convinced that He was Civan !
 Note that He in His grace enslaved me !
 Behold Him Who has Her with blue-lotus-like eyes as a part of Him!
 Behold simultaneously Her and Him !

The *Tiruvaacagam* is full of references to this guru-disciple relationship, this liege-lord and liege relationship which later turns into the lover and beloved relationship where Maanickavaacagar is the bride of the Lord.

We often hear a person - an aspirant for the spiritual life-say that he is seeking a *guru*. A person who says so speaks out of ignorance. In the realm of spiritual life, it is the *guru* who seeks out the disciple even as a cow whose udder is swollen with milk seeks out its calf. This

is not some fabled tradition, but an actual fact as has been time and again established from time immemorial right down to the present day. And so indeed it happened in the case of Maanickavaacagar. Again and again, almost in every decad, Maanickavaacagar reiterates this fact of God seeking him out and pouring grace into him. In fact, he throws the entire burden of redeeming him on God because it was God Who, of His own accord, sought him out and took him under His overlordship. In the very first decad, *The Civapuranam*, he exploits this situation in which God has let himself in for a very onerous task of redeeming a recalcitrant devotee. Recalcitrant he was by his own admission. In the 4th song of the 6th decad he pleads thus :

“Do not abandon me who, while You with Your extended hand of mercy caught hold of me, has slipped away hither and flits about (eluding You).”

In the first decad he says :

For my sake, who, on account of an obstructing mind,
Is devoid of the grace of merging in You with love,
And of thawing and melting within my (stony) heart,
You came down on this earth
And showed to base me, fallen lowlier than a cur,
Your far-famed feet ;
Oh Truth with tenderness surpassing that of a mother !
(lines 57 to 61)

In line 74 of the same decad he sings :

“ Oh my Father and Noble Lord who pulled me (unto You)
And assumed lordship over me ! ”

In the 6th song of decad 33 we hear him declaring thus :

You of Your own seeking took me in Your service,
Therefore, whatsoever You do in Your grace,
The same I seek ;
But should there remain in me
(Any trace of) a traft
Of desiring something (of my own volition),
Is not that too Your sweet will ?

I can go on quoting scores of such references, but I shall content myself with quoting only one more. In the 10th song of decad 38 he emphatically denies any effort of his own. He sings :

Did I indeed perform ascetic deeds,
And Ci-vaa-ya-na-ma gained to chant ?
Civan, the mighty Lord,
Who tastes sweet like honey and delicious ambrosia,
Of His own accord came and entered my heart,
And to me His slave did the gracious favour
Of impelling me to castigate my carnal life and hate it.

Of course, a life of contemplation (thavam) is possible only to those who have a vocation for it. Tiruvalluvar says :

Thavam is possible only to those who have a vocation for it ;
It is vain for those without that to undertake thavam.

Thomas Merton, a great contemplative - thapasvi - of this century, has a lot to say of this vocation in his autobiography called *The Seven Store Mountain*. In fact, an unimaginative monk delayed by many years Merton's accession to the contemplative life by telling him brusquely that he had no vocation for that type of life. This caused Merton many years of misery.

But a vocation too is only bestowed by God. Maanickavaacagar underscores this truth in these words:-

“By His grace His feet worshipping”
in line 18 of *Civapuraanam* and again three lines later thus:

On the One with an eye in His forehead
Beckoning me with His gracious glance,
I coming nigh,
Those beyond-reach-of-thought notable feet worshiped.

That this is true now as then is clear from the words of the fourteenth century unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* * and from the words of Rev. Fr. Johnston of the present century who profusely quotes from the *Cloud of Unknowing* **. Thus Fr. Johnston, under the heading, “Vocation to Contemplation”:

“The author (of the *Cloud of Unknowing*) is well aware of the dangers of entering the cloud of forgetting before one’s time. One of his reasons for insisting that his book may not be given to everyone is his fear that some young person, filled with good will, on hearing of mystical things may imagine that he is called to the contemplative life and end up in a condition that is ‘madness and no wisdom’.

“Even good people must be careful”, he continues, “not to enter this path prematurely ; they must wait for

* **The cloud of Unknowing** published by Early English Text Society, Original Series 218, Edited by Phyllis Hodgson, London 1944.

** **The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing** by Rev. Fr. William Johnston S. J., of Sophia University in Tokyo. Published by Desclee Company (New York) 1967.

the call of God. The Good Shepherd calls into the sheepfold those whom He will and He does so quite gratuitously Those not called must patiently and humbly wait outside. Indeed the author (of the *Cloud of Unknowing*) protests that he himself cannot teach contemplation, nor can any man. He says :

‘ And if thou ask me by what means thou shalt come to this work, I beseech Almighty God of his great courtesy to teach thee himself. For truly I do well to let thee know that I cannot tell thee. And this is no wonder. Because it is the work of only God, specially wrought in whatever soul he liketh, without any merit of the same soul. For without it no saint or angel can think to desire it’.

Johnston continues and says :

“ Thus the grace is given by God alone, as he liketh, where he liketh, and when he liketh.”

Milleniums earlier, the Katha Upanishad said :

“ The goal which all Vedaas proclaim...it is Om. This syllable is Brahman. The Aatman (i. e., Brahman), smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest, dwells in the heart of the creatures. This Aatman cannot be attained by the Vedaas, nor by intellect, nor even by much hearing the sacred scriptures: by him it is attained whom It chooses.”

Let us revert to Maanickavaacagar before the irate king. He told the king, just as he was bidden by his *guru*, that the horses will come in a day or two. True enough they came, brought there by an Arab farrier, who was none else than Lord Civan Himself. The horses were

stabled along with the rest of the king's horses ; but in the night the newly arrived animals turned into foxes which harried and maimed the rest of the horses. The king was enraged when he was told about this. The farrier was nowhere to be seen. The king threw Maanickavaacagar into prison. Again the Lord came to the rescue of his liege, and made the perennially dry⁶ bed of the river *Vaigai* to fill with a never-before-seen flood which began to devastate the king's realm. The King ordered the people to send one man from each family, by hire if necessary, to raise bunds to contain the flood waters. One old woman, a seller of steamed rice rolls, had neither a male member in her family nor could she hire anyone as every available man had been engaged already by others. In her plight, Lord Civan came to her as a cooly and offered to work for her provided she gave as wages the crumbs fallen off the rolls she had cooked. She agreed, and the divine labourer went to the work spot with spade and basket, and soon busied himself with loafing about the area or dozing off on a sand bank with the basket for a pillow or playfully demolishing the work of others under the pretence of helping them. The king who came on a round of inspection noticed this frisky truant, who was now bent almost double before him in feigned humility, and with his royal cane gave a cut across the back of the miscreant. And lo! the blow fell on all the creatures of the world, man and beast. The king realised his error and released Maanickavaacagar who promptly bade good-bye to all worldly ties and set out on his journey on the path of no return, the *meendum vaaraa vazhi*, the path of no return to the cycle of births.

That day is a red letter day in the spiritual history of Tamilnaadu. That day led Maanickavaacagar stage by

stage to the Godhead, and thereby to release from the cycle of births ; that day Maanickavaacagar the poet and mystic was born.

Who is a mystic ? In the words of Thomas Merton, which I have slightly changed in the matter of tenses only to suit the context, •

“a mystic is one who surrenders to a power of love that is greater than human and advances toward God in a darkness that goes beyond the light of reason and of human conceptual knowledge. Furthermore, there is no infallible way of guaranteeing the mystic against every mistake ; he can never be perfectly sure of any human technique. Only the grace of God can protect him and guide him. In other words, when we speak of mysticism, we speak of an area in which man is no longer completely in command of his own life, his own mind, and of his own will. Yet at the same time his surrender is to a God who is ‘more intimate to him than his own self’ and therefore mysticism precludes *real* alienation. In mystical union, God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally ‘one Spirit’ ”.

Maanickavaacagar, according to the above definition, is a mystic par excellence. His surrender to a love that is greater than human is something extraordinarily remarkable even in the history of mysticism. Kahlil Gibran, the Lebanese mystic of this century, speaking of love says :

Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself.
He threshes you to make you naked.
He sifts you to free you from your husks.
He grinds you to whiteness.
He kneads you until you are pliant.

And then he assigns you to his sacred fire that you may become
sacred bread for God's sacred feast,

All these things shall love do unto you that you may know the
secrets of your heart, and in that knowledge become a fragment
of Life's heart.

All this and more did love do unto Maanickavaacagar.
He sings :

On the One without a peer coming Himself
And relating His *I alone am* nature,
That people like me may pay heed to it,
And on His challengingly hailing me
And assuming lordship over me,
And in His grace, showing Himself to me
In the guise of a brahmin,
I, with uncloying love melting my bones,
Wailed with loud lamentations,
And, clamouring louder
Than the surf of the billowing sea,
Fell down with my head all topsy-turvy,
And rolled and wailed :
Madder than madmen, more gleeful than frenzied men,
To the puzzlement of the citizens
And the wonderment of the hearers,
Worse than a rutting elephant,
Which would not be mounted,
I was besides myself. (*lines 146 to 156 of 3rd decad*)

In another context Maanickavaacagar sings thus :

When in the heart of contemplatives
Thought of God was born,
And on that Being, who is free from hate,
Contemplation set in,
Six crores of delusive powers
Severally began their illusive play ;

Neighbours – close friends all – gathered round
 And talked atheism till their tongues became calloused ;
 Relatives, the ancestral herd of cattle,
 Seized them, implored them,
 And became impatient with them ;
 By and large, penance itself as supreme,
 Brahmins glibly proved by Vedic texts :
 Sectarian disputants,
 Claiming their respective creeds only as perfect,
 Clamorously clashed (with each other) :
 The tornado called staunch *maayaa-vaadam*—
 (The dogma that the world is but an empty dream)—
 Swirled and blew and roared,
 The while the conflicting cultural deadly poison
 Of Epicurianism — the dazzling doughty snake —
 Came and joined forces.
 While, thereby, several great delusions
 Encompassed the contemplatives,
 They swerved not,
 But unflaggingly held on to their faith :
 Like wax faced with fire,
 With melting heart they worshipped, wept, trembled,
 Danced, shouted, sang, prayed :
 Even like the artisan's vice and fools
 Who never let go what they catch hold of,
 Due to unintermitting pure love,
 Becoming firm in faith
 Like a nail driven into a green tree,
 With tears increasingly trickling,
 And mind in a whirl like the sea,
 With heart sore and body shivering in unison,
 Eschewing shyness,
 And assuming people's scornful words
 As ornament verily,

Losing all casuistry, their intelligence in a whirl,
 With the aimed-at-goal
 (Of deliverance from birth) as the supreme miracle,
 They remained unswerving in mind :
 And lowing and all atwitter like a calved cow,
 Not thinking of another god even in a dream,
 Not despising as a little thing
 The greatness of the grace of Him of unique heaven
 In coming down on earth and becoming *guru* supreme,
 His sacred twin feet,
 Like their shadow which,
 Now fore, now aft, but never knows separation,
 They never grew tired of :
 Their very bones softened and melted,
 Their hearts yearned with sigh after sigh,
 The river called love overflowed its banks thither *
 Their goodly senses coalesced,
 And they clamoured "Oh Lord, our Sire" :
 While their speech stumbled,
 And the hair on their bodies stood on end,
 Their hands, the flowers,
 Folded in worship into shape of lotus-bud,
 And their hearts, flowers all, blossomed out :
 Their eyes flushed with delight,
 Droplets dewing on them :
 While thus unswerving love all day long they cherished,
 Their very mother, Oh Lord, you became
 And brought them up. —(lines 42 to 86 of *decad 4*)

Maanickavaacagar's incessant prayer to God was to grant
 him love towards Him. He sings :

In pretence, imitating your devotees,
 Through their midst, I rush in a great hurry

* thither=Godward.

To enter the land of deliverance :
 Oh You, splendid gem-set golden hill,
 Unintermitting love unto You
 To take root in the core of my heart and melt it,
 Do You grant in Your grace, Oh my Owner ! —(5-11)

If ever any contemplative can be said to have been totally and exclusively filled with the “blind stirring of love”, which the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* speaks of, we can unhesitatingly say that Maanickavaacagar was so filled.

Of his surrender to a God who is more intimate to him than his own self, I need but quote only a few stanzas out of several which I can quote to establish this point. Maanickavaacagar was a saivite saint, if any mystic, even after his immediate and intimate apprehension of the Real, can still be classified under the label of an institutional religion. But he surpasses even the Vaishnavites in the matter of surrender, *saranagathi*, to God. In two successive poems in the *Kuzhaltha-paththu*, a very highly significant decad in *The Tiruvaacagam*, he sings thus :

Me a cur, the basest of curs, you took a fancy for,
 And of your own accord enslaved me ;
 Other than leaving in your hands
 This matter of delusive birth,
 Is it for me to research into it ?
 Is mine the authority here ?
 Thrust me into a body
 Or set me under Your anklet-girt feet (as you please),
 Oh Lord with an eye in the forehead ! —(33-8)

He follows with another song which goes further than the former in surrender to the Divine will. He sings :

Oh Lord with an eye in the forehead,
 I have, to the delight of my eyes,
 Beheld Your anklet-girt feet ;
 Instead of meditating on them day and night
 To the exclusion of all other thought,
 Shall I, Oh my Father,
 Brood on shedding this body on earth
 And entering the haven of Your feet ?
 Fine, indeed, is my serfdom to You. —(33-9)

Maanickavaacagar's surrender was total without reservations. He sings :

Abide in me and enslave me,
 Sell me, mortgage me, but this apart,
 Do not turn me away,
 A stranger who has sought your hospitality,
 Oh Lord who ate the poison
 As exceedingly sweet ambrosia !
 Oh Medicine to those who are crippled
 By the disease of birth ! —(6-18)

The Tiruvaacagam, then, is the story of Maanickavaacagar's love for God – a love that is greater than human – and of his surrender to a God who is more intimate to him than his own self. We saw earlier who a mystic is. He is one who surrenders to a love that is greater than human, and advances toward God..... and whose surrender is to a God who is more intimate to him than his own self. On these premises, Ramachandra Deekshitar, the author of *Studies in Tamil Literature and History* is more than justified in calling *The Tiruvaacagam* a handbook of mystical theology. He says :

“ *The Tiruvaacagam* relates an autobiographical story of the different stages of Maanickavaacagar's spiritual

life and experience which ultimately enabled him to attain bliss ineffable and eternal. It is a torrential outflow of ardent religious feelings and emotions in rapturous songs and melodies. The work may be regarded as a convenient handbook on mystical theology."

Dr. R. D. Ranade, the author of three books on *Pathway to God*, through Marathi Literature, Kannada Literature, and Hindi Literature respectively, says of Maanickavaacagar :

"In him we see the upspringing of a natural devotion to God. which, through a consciousness of his faults, rises by gradations to the apprehension of the Godhead. In his great poem he makes us aware, as Dr. Carpenter puts it, of his first joy and exaltation, his subsequent waverings, his later despondencies, his consciousness of faults, his intensive shame and his final recovery and triumph."

The Tiruvaacagam is not merely a handbook of mystical theology, it is an Upanishad - as much an Upanishad as any of the ten principal Upanishads.

The Four, as Maanickavaacagar, Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar are lovingly called in Tamilnaadu, were the spearheads of a revolutionary movement in matters religious and spiritual in the south. A decadence had set in the life of the people. The apostles of other religions - Buddhism and Jainism - found their opportunity in this very favourable atmosphere and seized the minds of the people with their tenets and beliefs, and had very soon made converts of the kings of the land, after which the conversion of the people was but the enforcement of a

royal decree. The people were confused and torn among themselves. These four saints came to them as the leaders of a spiritual renaissance in Tamilnaadu. They did not come to establish any new institutional or revealed religion. They came to restate the great truth – the perennial philosophy – and to lead the people toward the Godhead. It is therefore that we find all their outpourings of song mystical in character.

R. D. Ranade, writing in his introduction to *Mysticism in Maharashtra*,* says :

“A mystical vein of thought has been present throughout the development of Indian Philosophy from the age of the Upanishads downwards ; but it assumes an extraordinary importance when we come to the second millenium of the Christian era which sees the birth of the practical spiritual philosophy taught by the mystics of the various provinces of India.”

But even five to six centuries before this period, Tamilnaadu saw the birth of a mysticism with a genius of its own. Discussing the difference between the Upanishads and the Middle Age Ranade says :

“The mysticism of the Upanishads is different from the mysticism of the Middle Age, in as much as it was merely a tidal wave of the philosophy of the ancient seers while the other was the natural outcome of the heart, full of piety and devotion, the consciousness of sin and misery and final desire to assimilate with the divine. The Upanishadic mysticism was a naive

* History of Indian Philosophy : Vol : 7. Indian Mysticism-Mysticism in Maharashtra (1933) by R. D. Ranade, Professor of Philosophy, University of Allahabad.

philosophical mysticism ; the mysticism of the Middle Age was a mysticism which hated all philosophical explanations or philosophical imaginings as useless, when contrasted with the appropriation of the Real. The Upanishadic mysticism was the mysticism of men who lived in cloisters far away from the bustle of humanity, and who, if they permitted any company at all, permitted only the company of their disciples. The Mysticism of the Middle Age was a mysticism which engrossed itself in the practical upliftment of the human kind, based on the sure foundation of one's own perfect spiritual development. The Upanishadic mysticism did not come forward with the deliberate purpose of mixing with men in order to ameliorate their spiritual condition. The business of the mystic of the Middle Age consisted in mixing with the ordinary run of mankind, with sinners, with pariahs, with women, with people who cared not for the spiritual life, with people who had even mistaken notions about it, with, in fact, everybody who wanted, be it ever so little, to appropriate the Real."

"We may say," concludes Ranade, "that as we pass from the Upanishadic mysticism to the mysticism of the Middle Age, we see the spiritual life brought from the hidden cloisters to the market place."

Thus arose, as Ranade says :

"a Democratic Mysticism which laid stress upon the vernaculars as the medium of mystical teaching as opposed to the classical mysticism of ancient times, which had Sanscrit as its language of communication. It was a democratisation not merely in language, but also in the spirit of teaching, and we see how mysticism became the property of all."

These differences should not be allowed, however, to lead us to the conclusion that Maanickavaacagar reveals something different from or antagonistic to the teachings of the world's earliest mystics – the Seers of the Upanishads.*

To quote Ranade again :

“The mystics of all ages and countries form an eternal divine society. There are no religious, no communal, no national prejudice among them. Time and place have nothing to do with the eternal and infinite character of their mystical experience.....They have the same teachings about the name of God, the fire of devotion, the nature of Self-realisation. It is only due to overweening superciliousness that people regard the mystics of one country as different from, or superior to, the mystics of other lands or faiths. If all men are equal before God and if men have got the same ‘deiform faculty’, which enables them to ‘see God face to face’, then, there is no meaning in saying that there is a difference between the quality of God – realisation of some as apart from the God-realisation of others. It is true that there may be physical, mental, and temperamental differences, but there is no difference in the quality of their mystical or intuitive realisation.”

The Tiruvaacagam, therefore, makes available to the people of Tamilnaadu the same pathway to the Godhead even as the Upanishads do. If there is a distinction, it is this, – the Upanishads state the proposition, *The Tiruvaacagam*, furnishes the proof.

* Correspondence between Maanickavaacagar's thoughts and those of the Upanishads will be shown in notes at appropriate places of the translation of the various decads.

The Tiruvaacagam, therefore, is not a mere *ad hoc* collection of devotional poems. It is a treatise on the theology of mysticism. But treatises are usually extremely dull, but not so *The Tiruvaacagam*. The reason is that it is not an intellectual work, but a spontaneous outpouring of the heart's travail and triumph in most melodious song. The very elements of democratisation which are *The Tiruvaacagam's* speciality are also the cause of people's failure to realise as well its identity with the perennial truths revealed in the Upanishads, as the comprehensive system of thought, – the book of mystical theology. The cadence of its songs, the unique sweetness of the Tamil language, the use of simple household words to whose pregnant and poignant thought – content the Tamil mind has become insensible through over-familiarity, these factors contrive to make us unaware of the great heritage we have in *The Tiruvaacagam*. Its flood of devotional outpourings has submerged the scintillating gems of spiritual teachings even as a torrent of tears hides the iris of the eyes. As Aldous Huxley says ;

“Familiarity with traditional hallowed writings tends to breed, not indeed contempt, but something which, for practical purposes, is almost as bad, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of the sacred words.”

If I can compare *The Tiruvaacagam* to any works in the English language, I can compare it only to the *Psalms* of David and to the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis. The entire *Tiruvaacagam* is in the form of direct speech, even like the *Psalms* of David and the entreaties of Thomas a Kempis. God is addressed in the second person. This enables us to appropriate the poems and

make them our very own, identify ourselves with the thoughts of the poems and make them instruments of our personal appeal to God about our own spiritual problems.

The Tiruvaacagam is, no doubt, a story, a history, an autobiography of a love greater than human, but for lack of human conceptual phraseology, it is cast in the form of an intensely human love-play between a bride and a bridegroom, in which Maanickavaacagar is cast in the role of the bride. This concept is particularly eastern, but western mystics are not strangers to this role. Among all the commentators, only Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiaar of Jaffna has stated that the entire *Tiruvaacagam* is indeed a work belonging to the *ahaththurai*, i. e., literature dealing with love, in this case, not earthy but ethereal, spiritual, divine.

I must give here a brief sketch of the architectonics of *The Tiruvaacagam*. It has 51 decads (poems of ten stanzas each but not always so in *The Tiruvaacagam*) comprising 658 stanzas. *The Tiruvaacagam* is not divided into books or cantos, but, if one were to do so, it can be divided into four parts. The first four decads would form one part. Of this, the first decad, the *Civapuraanam*, is a prologue, or, what is called in Tamil, '*tharrchchirappu-paayiram*'. It is more than this. It deals with the Godhead, the nameless and formless God, '*oru naamam ore uruvam ondrum illaathan*', the Brahman, the God within of Aldous Huxley. When I say that it deals with the Godhead, do not imagine a dry as dust dissertation in abstruse language on the abstract Brahman. For simplicity and sweetness, for sheer poetry and telling imagery, for music and melody, it is unsurpassed. Let me quote some lines (62 to 83) from this decad.

Oh Spotless Effulgence (Who) blossomed (in my heart)
 As a (multi-) petalled flame !
 Oh my Guru ! Honied Ambrosia ! Lord of Civapuram !
 Oh Eminent One who severs the hold of 'paasam '*
 And nurtures me !
 Oh Mighty River of abundant grace,
 Who, exercising loving charity,
 Stands unmovingly in my heart
 To the detriment of the vile therein !
 Unsatiating Ambrosia ! Measureless Mighty One !
 Oh Light that lies hid in the hearts of those
 Who do not contemplate on You !
 Oh You Who melted me into water
 And stood established in me
 Verily as my dear life !
 Oh You Who have not and yet have joy and sorrow !
 Lover to those who love You !
 Oh Everything and Nothing !
 Oh Effulgence ! Oh Dense Darkness !
 Oh the One with the distinction of having no births !
 Oh Beginning ! Oh End ! Oh Middle ! Oh None of these !
 Oh my Father and noble Lord
 Who pulled me unto You and enslaved me !
 Oh Rare-to-be-viewed Vision
 In the conception of those who intuit You
 With one pointed true gnosis !
 Oh Subtlest of subtle experience !
 Oh Pure One without going or coming or commingling !
 Oh our safeguarding Watchman !
 Oh Ungazable Blazing Light !

* paasam = the three taints of *aanavam*, *kanmam*, *maayai*, i. e., ignorance, the twin deeds of good and evil, and the matrix of the five elements.

Oh Flood – stream of Bliss !
 Oh my Father ! Oh much more than that !
 Oh Clarity ! Oh Quintessence of Clarity,
 Who, as the light of a flame
 Of stable aspect
 And as ineffable subtle experience,
 Coming in the form of diverse things
 In this changing world,
 Becomes Gnosis !
 Oh Unsatiated Spring of Ambrosia in my thoughts !
 Oh my Liege – Lord !

The second decad deals with God with forms and names, the many *moorthies* enshrined in the temples along the length and breadth of Tamilnaadu. It does much more than this. It is a first person account by Maanickavaacagar of the manner in which God enslaved him and other devotees before him stage by stage at various places by diverse means, all the time pouring grace on them and drawing them closer and closer for the ultimate embrace in eternal union.

The third decad sings of the immanent God, God in creation. Rev. Fr. Johnston calls this aspect a metaphysical kind of wisdom, by which one can rise from the knowledge of creatures by causality to the Supreme Being who is the source of existence. The sun, the moon, the fire, the ether, the wind, the streams, and the earth, all give a true analogical knowledge of God. Maanickavaacagar sings :

Day by day, He endows the sun with effulgence,
 The resplendent moon He endows with coolness,
 He creates the heat in the fire of great might,
 To the pure ether He gives pervasiveness,

And the glorious wind receives its energy from Him,
 To the streams that meander in the shade,
 It is He who gives them their sweet savour,
 He endows the earth with its firmness;
 Thus and thus many crores of things and more,
 In similar manner he permeates. (Lines 20 to 28)

The first three decads cover man's concept of God in its entirety. The fourth decad is a synthesis of all the three previous decads. In this decad of 225 lines Maanickavaacagar swings from one aspect to another, now praising the Godhead, now the form-endowed God, and now the immanent God, and ends with the following stirring lines :

Oh infinitely infinite Effluence ! Praised be Thee,
 Praised be Thee, praised be Thee;
 Oh Lord adorned with snakes !
 Praised be Thee, praised be Thee;
 Oh Ancient Cause ! praised be Thee, praised be Thee;
 Victory, Victory to Thee, Praised be Thee !

(Lines 223-225)

The second part will comprise the fifth and sixth decads, the *Tiruchchathagam* and the *Neeththal Vinnappam* i. e., the *Sacred Hundred* and the *Forsake Me Not Plaint*.

Maanickavaacagar does not take the role of the bride overtly right from the beginning of his initiation by the *Guru*, Lord Civa himself, under the *kurundha* tree in *Perunthurai*. Tradition and dogma had him in their grip, rightly enough, I should say. For, to all but a rare few, the road to unitive knowledge of God is in the beginning through the usual course of spiritual disciplines, faith, dogma and tradition. In setting out the qualifications of the reader who is fit to read the *Cloud of Unknowing*, its anonymous author says :

“He should be one who does all he can to help himself in this life by a faithful heeding of moral and spiritual disciplines, and had been doing so for a long time”.

Maanickavaāṣagar relates his life of such moral and spiritual disciplines in the 5th deśad.

The section on asceticism in *The Tirukkural* has thirteen chapters, nine of which deal with the spiritual discipline which an aspirant to asceticism should follow. *The Tiruchchathakam* in *The Tiruvaacagam* has a hundred verses divided into ten sub-decads of ten verses each, seven of which deal with the disciplines an aspirant for the apprehension of the Godhead has to follow. The remaining three decads describe “the assurance of a comforting and mighty presence which grows on one more and more until one realises that it is God revealing Himself in a light that is painful to one’s nature”.

The sub-decads have been given their own titles. They are :

- Discrimination of the Real
- Appraising God of one’s aspirations
- Abandoning discursive method of knowing
- Purification of the soul
- Rendering a fit return for grace received
- Purification of Experience
- Pleading for divine compassion
- Being steeped in bliss
- Ecstatic bliss
- Transcendent bliss

The Tiruchchathakam is a manual of instructions for the conquest of the self and the apprehension of the one

Reality. A study of the hundred verses will show that the varied disciplines are indeed formidable. The disciplines related in these verses appear to correspond to what Thomas Merton calls "the most usual entrance to contemplation". He says :

"The most usual entrance to contemplation is through a desert of aridity in which, although you see nothing and feel nothing and are conscious only of a certain interior suffering and anxiety, yet you are drawn and held in this darkness and dryness because it is the only place in which you can find any kind of stability and peace. As you progress, you learn to rest in this arid quietitude, and the assurance of a comforting and mighty presence at the heart of the experience grows on you more and more, until you gradually realise that it is God revealing Himself to you in a light that is painful to your nature and to all its faculties, because it is infinitely above them and because its purity is at war with your own selfishness and darkness and imperfection."

Any one well acquainted with the hundred verses of *The Tiruchchathakam* will realise how true is the content of those verses to the state of contemplation described by Merton. I shall pick out at random five of songs from this decad and reproduce them to show the truth of what I mean. Maanickavaacagar sings in the beginning, the middle and the end, in fact throughout the decad in terms of "a certain interior suffering and anxiety".

I do not call for You with surcharged love, ever persistently hailing You and praising You and rolling in anguish;

My code of conduct seems to be like that of the Lord
of Death who had to feel the (sting of) the lotus feet
(of Civan) aimed at him. (5-45)

Here is another stanza :

Oh Rare-to-be-attained One^oby anybody !
Oh Pervader of the ether !
Oh Great Lord of the stage (of my heart) !
Oh Great One ! I do not shower fragrance-laden flowers
On the dazzling feet which enslaved me ;
I do not cry in amazement ;
I do not melt in adoration :
I cannot tarry (in this world) ;
What will I come to ?
I will perish, perish I will. 5-18

Yet another stanza :

I myself am a lie ! my heart is a lie !
My love too is a lie !
But if karma-tainted me would weep,
I could gain You,
Oh Honey ! Oh Ambrosia !
Oh Essence of the sugarcane !
Oh sweet Great One, bestow on me, Your slave,
Your grace that I may come unto You. 5-90

Yet one more :

There is no love in me to Your anklet-girt feet,
Oh Partner of her with tresses
Dressed with cardamom scented pomade ;
By the miracle of turning a stone into a soft fruit,
You made me a devotee to Your anklet-girt feet ;
Your grace has no limits ;

By whatever means whatever I may do,
 Capable indeed You are to yet show me
 Your anklet-girt feet,
 And redeem me, Oh spotless heavenly One ! 5-94

One last song shall I quote :

Unsuitable am I ; falsehood have I ;
 Meaning by Your glance “ come unto Me ”,
 When You invitingly looked at me,
 Pains I did not take ; wiles I have ;
 Die I did not, Oh You with lotus flower feet !
 Oh You with rosy body,
 You and those devotees who have received Your grace
 Having departed thither,
 You detained me here.
 Is this just, Oh my Lord, Oh our Lord ?
 To the karma of wilful me is there no end ? 5-93

“ Desert of aridity ”, “ interior suffering and anxiety ”, “ a light that is painful to one’s nature and to all its faculties, because its purity is at war with one’s own selfishness, and imperfection ”. These were terms in the passage from Merton’s *Seeds of Contemplation*. All these aspects of experience are only too clearly evident in the stanzas I have just now quoted from *The Tiruchchathakam*. If there are any doubts about Maanickavaacakar’s sense of frustration, despondency and distraught condition of mind at this stage of his spiritual journey, they will be dispelled when we examine the 50 poems in the next decad which bears the title of *Neeththal Vinnappam*.

The Neeththal Vinnappam, i. e., the ‘ Forsake Me Not Plaint ’, is a heart-rending entreaty in 50 stanzas. Each stanza has the same refrain,—“ forsake me not ”. The

last three stanzas of this decad will be enough to show Maanickavaacagar's sense of frustration and despair at this stage of his spiritual life.

He sings thus :

Oh Mighty One who wears a string of skulls
 Like a garland of stars,
 And sports in the hands the fire and the snakes !
 Forsake me not ;
 If You do, when the exalted ones ask me,
 "Whose henchman are you ? ",
 I shall hold You up to derisive laughter
 By replying that I am the honourable servant
 Of the servants of the King of Uttarakosamangai ! 6-48

He continues :

I shall hold You up to derisive laughter,
 And shall say at length
 That this contemptible life and service of mine
 Are dedicated to You, my Lord !
 Forsake me not.
 If You do, I shall traduce You by calling You
 The madman donning the pelt of the raging elephant,
 The crank who feeds on poison,
 The crazy one with the fire
 From the hamlet's cremation ground,
 And (to crown all) the nitwit
 Who has me as his bondsman. 6-49

He concludes thus :

Whether I traduce You or praise You,
 Do not forsake me,
 Who languishes here repenting for his sins,

Oh You resplendent like a red coral hill !
 Oh You who has sway over me !
 Oh You whose right it is to feed on ambrosia,
 But who ate the raging poison
 Out of compassion for the lowly creatures ! 6-50

On account of this sense of frustration and despair which is common to the fifth and sixth decads, I consider them as forming a unified part which describes that part of the life of Maanickavaacagar in which he went through an attempt to apprehend the Godhead through the intellect.

Arivu – intellect – and *unarvu* – intuition – are very different things. The *Katha Upanishad* has this verse :

“The wise man should merge speech in mind, the latter he should merge in the intellect ; the intellect he should merge in the great Self. That he should merge in Shaantaatman, the tranquil Self.”

“The soul”, explains Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, “must go beyond all images in the mind, all workings of the intellect, and, by the process of abstraction, the soul is rapt above itself and flows into God in whom are peace and fulness.”

This can be achieved only by the third mode of contemplation described by Thomas Merton. Fr. Johnston calls this the third kind of wisdom. Merton says of his third mode of contemplation :

“Then there is a *quietud subrosa*, a tranquility full of savour and rest and unction in which, although there is nothing to feed and satisfy the senses or the imagination or the intellect, the will rests in a deep, luminous and absorbing experience of love”

Fr. Johnston says :

“The third kind of wisdom is mystical: this is experimental knowledge of God as He is in Himself. The apophatic* mystics speak of it as silent, supraconceptual, dark, infused by God Himself. This is the highest wisdom man can attain to in this life ; in comparison with it (in the words of the author of *The Cloud*) natural knowledge is but feigned folly formed in fantasy, as far from the very certainty when the ghostly sun shineth, as the darkness of the moonshine in a mist at midwinter’s night from the brightness of the sunbeam in the clearest time of midsummer day. Mystics will often say that by comparison with what they have seen in prayer, scientific knowledge and theology are like ignorance. ”

But this does not mean the rejection of the first two modes of contemplation, or wisdom as Fr. Johnston will call them, in favour of the third. The traditional position is, in the words of Fr. Johnston, that

“there is only one truth, known imperfectly by reason, more clearly by faith, more clearly still by mystical experience, and perfectly in the beatific vision. Faith does not contradict reason but builds on it ; mystical knowledge does not contradict reason or revelation but builds on them. Far from being a rejection of dogma, it is a supraconceptual penetration of those mysteries that are formulated conceptually (and, for that reason, imperfectly) in dogma.”

Thus Fr. Johnston, to whom I am deeply indebted for making dumb me articulate.

*Apophatic mystics’ – so called because of their tendency to emphasise that God is best known by negation ; we can know much more about what God is **not** than about what He is.

II

The third of the hypothetical parts, into which, I think, *The Tiruvaacagam* can be divided, relates in epic language the deep luminous and absorbing experience of love which was the great privilege of Manickavaacagar to have in his life.

If, even in the 90th stanza of *The Tiruchchathakam*, he sings :

I myself am a lie ; my heart is a lie ; my love too is a lie ;
But if karma-tainted me would weep, I could gain you,
Oh Honey ! Oh Ambrosia ! Oh Essence of the sugarcane !
Oh Sweet Great One !
Graciously show me the road
By which this slave may come unto You.

and in the 93rd he sings :

“ To the karma of this wilful me is there no end ? ”,
and if, even in the 100th, the last stanza of *The Tiruchchatakam* he sings : “ I should abandon all falsehood ”,
surely, then the road he followed in *The Tiruchchatakam* had not been of great benefit to him. The royal road to God for Maanickavaacagar was certainly not the traditional one of austerities, penances, mortification of the body, fasts and all the hundred and one methods of self-castigation associated in the popular mind with *thavam*, a life of contemplation. For Maanickvaacagar sings that God hid Himself completely from the vision of even those “ who, discarding far behind their senses five, went to inaccessible mountains, and, with the body stripped of all but the bare breath, performed rare austerities ”. Elsewhere, describing the grace gratuitously shown to him, Maanickavaacagar sings :

The heaven-born *devaas* and Indra
 Along with Vishnu and Brahma,
 While they stayed in forests and got withered,
 And anthills rose up round them,
 You, Who were rare to be seen by them,
 Came of Your own accord,
 And to this cur, even like a cnother,
 Showed special favour.....”

8-4

He returns to this theme again and again as if he would underscore the futility of seeking God with mortification of the body. In stanza 12 of decad 11 he says :

Let us proclaim our clear confirmation,
 Till it turns sweet in our mouths.
 Of the Transcendent Effulgence
 Who, while the large body of ascetics
 Stood sore wearied toiling for deliverance,
 Bestowed grace on the elephant
 (And likewise) assumed lordship over me too,
 And set me in the sea of devotion.

11-12

He recurs to this theme again in decad 23 in these words :

Overgrown with anthill and trees
 (While they stood or sat in contemplation),
 With water and air (only) for food,
 Dwellers in the (heavenly) spheres and others
 Have withered seeking you, ;
 Oh King, Whose blossom feet none of them have seen,
 You mesmerised me with one word* and caught me :
 For this act of grace, I do not tremble,
 My hard mind does not melt over much,

* one word = the mystic five-lettered word, na-ma-ci-vaa-ya.

Nevertheless, I do not die ;
 I do not kill this undying body ;
 I still keep sojourning here,
 Oh Civan who abides in Tirupperunthurai ! 23-5

It is not strange that Maanickavaacagar did not take to austerities, penances, fasts, mortification of the body. It is not strange that he did not go away to the forests or that he did not follow any of the methods prescribed in Patanjali's Yoga-sutras. If one seriously thinks of the life of Tirugnanasambandar, Appar and Sundarar, who along with Maanickavaacagar are given the collective name of "The Four", it will strike one as a strange fact that none of them followed the Yoga-margaa, the path of soul-searing austerities. They followed the age old Tamil tradition, the path of love laid down in the *Tolkaappiyam*, *Irayanar's Ahapporul* and *The Tirukkural*. No language in the world except Tamil has a separate section of its grammar entirely devoted to the theme of love and its literature. It was a fashion once upon a time to say that the section on love in *The Tirukkural* corresponds to the Kama-sutraas of Vatsaayanaa. But, now, none but the crassly ignorant would ever venture to make that statement. No language in the world has so many literary works on the theme of love, love between a maid and a youth. The greatest of these is *The Tirukkovaaiyaar*, a work of 400 poems, each poem dealing with one situation, or 'thurai' as it is called in Tamil, in the love-play between a maid and a youth. Of this work, it has been sung thus :

'Behold the Vedaas' say the holy brahmins,
 'See root of the aagamaas', say the Yogins,
 But lovers say : 'it is grammar of love',

'Tis logic', say logicians anyhow ;
 'Literature it is' say pundit class,
 If one mentions Tirukkovai, the lovely lass.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Maanickavaacagar, the author of *The Tirukkovaiyaar*, should seek to gain God through the path of love. The *Naayaka-Naayaki bhaavam*, the concept of the lover and her beloved, the concept of a bride of the Lord is essentially a Tamil concept. The third part in my hypothetical division of *The Tiruvaacagam*, comprising sixteen decads, from the 7th to the 22nd, from *Tiruvempaavai* to the *Koil Tiruppathikam* is the book of this love by which Maanickavaacagar gains the unitive knowledge of God which, according to him, was denied to many who tried diverse other methods. He sings :

While He shone with a golden light,
 Comprising the lightning-like flash
 Of a heap of emeralds and a cluster of rubies,*
 From Brahmaa and Vishnu who searched for Him,
 He hid himself ;
 From those who toiled with mystic scrolls,
 He hid Himself ;
 From those who, to the grief of their kinsmen,
 Sought Him with single-minded devotion,
 He hid Himself ;
 From those who,
 Staking their faith in the power of the Vedic mantraas,
 Laboriously sought Him, He hid Himself ;
 From those who boasted to see Him by some rare device,
 By the same device, there itself,
 Did He hide Himself ;

* emeralds and rubies = these refer to the composite form of Civan — part male part female — in which Parvathi, (swarthy in colour) is like emeralds and Civan (flame-like in colour) is like rubies.

Bidding the five senses stay for behind,
 Seeking refuge in inaccessible hills,
 With bodies stripped of all but the bare breath,
 Ascetics in contemplation dwell on Him ;
 From their vision He securely hid Himself :
 Seeming to exist and not exist, eluding knowledge,
 He did hide Himself ;
 Whenever of old we strove to find Him,
 Even today when we strive,
 He hides Himself :
 "That Thief we have found now :
 Raise a hue and cry, raise a hue and cry ,
 With garlands woven of this morning's (fresh) blossoms,
 Fetter His feet ;
 Surround Him, encircle Him, follow Him, don't leave Him,
 Catch hold of Him."
 But He completely eluded the grasp of those who said so.

(*Lines 124 to 145 of decad 3*)

How, then, could He be apprehended ?

By love, unswerving, unflagging, shameless, boundless,
 and selfless. "Love does not possess", says Kahlil Gibran.
 It always gives. Love is the one device that God cannot
 escape, whose lure He cannot resist. He falls into the net
 of devout love.

In the spiritual world there is only one *Purushaa*, one
 Male, the *Purushoththaman*. All others are females engaged
 in adoration of the solitary Male, all eager to capture Him
 and enshrine Him, imprison Him, in their hearts. There-
 fore, Maanickavaacagar sings :

Saints who, abandoning all activities
 And their bonds cast off,
 In freedom dwell

And everlastingly perceive You in themselves,
 They all have come as maidens with beauteous dark eyes,
 And worship You,
 The Bridegroom of the awe-inspiring goddess,
 In the manner of human beings. 20-4

He sings further down in the same decad that for the same reason,

Said sacred Vishnu and flower - born Brahmaa
 As they gazed longingly on the earth,
 "Our days in vain we spend here
 Without going down to earth
 And being born (as human beings);
 Birth on the earth is the means
 Whereby Civan's grace is wont to save." 20 - 10.

For human beings, then, the way of worship is love, the consecration of oneself as the Lord's bride, - the *Naayaka - Naayaki bhaavam*.

Maanickavaacagar, on his own behalf and on behalf of all of us, becomes the Lord's Bride, and in this third part of his great work, he dances step by step into the Lord's heart till both hearts beat as one, till, in fact, there is none but one. This love-play is the sublimation of carnal love into spiritual love. Aldous Huxley quotes St. Bernard as saying :

"For my part, I think the chief reason which prompted the invisible God to become visible in the flesh and to hold converse with men was to lead carnal men, who are only able to love carnally, to the healthful love of His flesh, and afterwards, little by little, to spiritual love."

True to the scarcely admitted but very real characteristic of courtship, it is the maiden who sets her heart on a man, and woos him till he is irrevocably hers. Maanickavaacagar conforms to this tradition but with a unique difference. The seeker after the One Reality is a very love-sick maiden indeed, but with one great difference from her other earthly sisters. Her passion, it is true, sears her like a flame, but, in the process, it burns away all the dross of carnal and earthy love. When the chase is over and victory is hers, it is she who, as a suppliant, assures her Beloved thus :

“What service You demand, that we shall offer.”

True love always humbles itself in victory, for love is service. When love humbles itself, all desires dies. When desire dies, passion becomes passionless. Kothai Naachiyaar, in a similar context, sings :

For ever, for seven and seven births,
With You united shall we be ;
To You alone shall we be servitors ;
All our other passions do You transform.

In this love-play, Maanickavaacagar becomes a girl who has not yet entered her teens. She was scarcely twelve. The same age as Kannaki when she was married to Kovalan. Maanickavaacagar becomes a girl in the setting of a traditional game of young girls in the month of *Marghazhi* or, according to the ancient almanacs, the month of *Thai*. Little girls used to accompany their mothers to the river for a bath in the very early hours of the morning. The girls will call at each other's houses, and will go through the streets to the river chanting the names of the Lord and singing songs of His glory. It is in this setting that the *Thiruvempaavai*, ‘the 7th decad’ begins.

A little girl who has not yet entered her teens is sleeping in her house. It is very very early in the morning. But it was time to get up and join her companions who would soon be coming down the street chanting the thousand and one names of God on their way to the river for the *Margazhi Neeraadal*, the ritualistic traditional bath on all the days of the month of *Margazhi*. But our girl is fast asleep, perhaps dreaming herself to be in the arms of her beloved. For, does not Tiruvalluvar sing :

While I am asleep, he becomes a lover in my arms, but, when
I wake up, he hurriedly becomes a dweller in my heart. (1218)

She is in love, her lover is Maadevan, no other than Lord Civan Himself. She had not confided the secret of her love in any one. But her companions could have easily divined it, if they were not too young to understand such a passion as their companion's, too much engrossed in the *paavainonmbu*, too ready to dub her as a lazy sleepy-head. Many signs they had, but they did not see. They themselves mention those signs. They taunt her thus :

“ ‘Passion to Paranjothi’, you would say, day and night,
when we used to chat, and, moreover,

In the past, you used to rise from bed long before us
And come forward and repeat sweetly,
‘Oh my Lord ! Oh Bliss incarnate ! Oh Ambrosia !’
Till your mouth watered.” 7-2

But it did not strike them that that she could be in love,
and in love with God Himself out of all persons on earth.

In the olden days of the joint-family system, it was
the pastime of old women in the family to indulge in

match-making, coupling the names of a little boy and a little girl and solemnly decreeing that they were made for one another. And so it used to come to pass. In the meantime, the two children would be the target for teasing by one and all the members of the family, so much so that, when even the name of the boy was mentioned in the hearing of the little girl, she would run away in bashful confusion and hide herself behind the door or a cupboard.

Our little girl in love with God Himself was no exception to this. The very mention of the name, or names in this case, of her beloved would send a thrill throughout her little body till she fell in an ecstatic swoon. This is called *aananda paravasam*, becoming besides oneself with joy. It is in this state that the companions of our girl, whom I shall call, for the nonce, Sivakaami, find her and dub her a sleepyhead. They upbraid her in these words:

Even after hearing us sing
Of the unique Great Effulgence of grace
Without beginning or end,
Oh damsel with the bright wide eyes,
Do you still sleep or are your ears hard of hearing ?
On hearing the sound of the paeon of praise
Of the anklet-girt feet of Maadevan
Come echoing down the street,
Sob after sob tearing her frame,
Her body in a trance,
This damsel has rolled off her flower-strewn bedstead,
And lies here helpless !
What, what is this condition, Oh my chum !

It is quite clear that the companions of Sivakaami first mistook her to be yet sleeping, but, on looking at her closely, they were not so sure of it, and were extremely puzzled and perturbed. Ultimately they asked Sivakaami herself, "what, what indeed is this condition of yours?"

The entire *Tiruvempaavai*, from beginning to end, deals with this divine love of Sivakaami for Maadevan. Moreover, it is not to be taken as an isolated poem, complete in itself. On the other hand, it is only the first chapter in the love story of Sivakaami, and the tale is carried through the next fifteen decads till its culmination in the spiritual marriage of Sivakaami—of Maanickavacagar, the bride—with the Lord, the bridegroom. The sixteen decads beginning from the 7th, the *Tiruvempaavai*, and ending with the 22nd, the *Koil-Tiruppathikam*, form one indivisible unit, which deals with the triumph of love, a love more than human, in apprehending the Godhead, where all other means had failed and ended only in frustration.

It is usual to call fourteen of these sixteen decads as having a background of girlish games. Probably, it is for this reason that Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiaar classifies them as forming one unit. *Tiruvempaavai*, it is true, was a traditional girls' game, in which they formed an image of 'Paavai' out of the sand of the river, where they had accompanied their mothers in the early morning, and played at worshipping it. This game has gone out of vogue now. The next decad, *Tiruvammaanai*, has, it is true, the background of a game played by little girls even at present. It is an indoor game, played with cowries or small pebbles, in teeth of the disapproval of the mothers, for the pebbles, when tossed up for a catch, would

fall on the glass bangles worn on the wrists and smash them. But it is doubtful whether the rest of the decads really refer to games commonly played by girls. *Tirupporrchunnam*, i. e., pounding the scented powder for the bath of the bridegroom, and *Tirukkoththumbi*, a decad having as a theme the employment of the king of the dragon-flies as a messenger of love, do not appear to be common games of little girls, but special devices, specially wrought for the occasion by Maanickavaacagar himself. It is possible, however, that, in his days, there were such lyrical games to suit special occasions. *Tiruththellenam*, usually disposed off by commentators and lexicographers as 'a game played by girls', cannot have been a common game among little girls at any time. For, if we take away the suffix of 'thiru', what remains is 'thellenam', and this should make sense. I believe that this is a compound word made up of two separate words, 'thel' and 'enam'. 'Thel' means clear, lucid. *Enam*, the dictionary says, stands for bone, being firmly established, deer, the hide of the deer, and pain. It is clear that none of these meanings except the second one, i. e., 'being firmly established' fits the context. That is why I have translated *thellenam* as 'clear confirmation'. This decad expands in ten stanzas the assertion made in a single line (62 of decad 3), where Maanickavaacagar sings : 'Behold Him Whom I felt certain was Civan indeed'. This game, if it is a game at all, must be of Maanickavaacagar's own coining. The next one, *Tiruchchaazhal*, may well be a game of the past, an argument in poetry between a scoffer and a believer. Each poem in this decad is composed of a derisive question and a silencing reply. Maanickavaacagar uses this game, which, in my boyhood, I have heard played by girls in a school in front of my house, for his own purpose. The *Tiruppoovalli*, gathering

of flowers for the worship of God, may well have been songs sung by girls while gathering flowers for God's worship. *Tiruvundhiyaar* too could well have been songs for a sort of a dance by girls, where they sang of the prowess of Civan. The next one, *Tirúththozhnokkam*, it seems to me, cannot by any stretch of imagination be classed as a game played by little girls. Its maturity of thought makes this improbable. Commentators and lexicographers have again dismissed this term as denoting a game of little girls. It is evident that it is a compound word made up of 'tiru', 'thozh' and 'nokkam'. If we drop the word 'tiru', *thozhnokkam* will mean looking at or staring at or gazing on the shoulders. Maanicka-vaacagar himself uses this term in an earlier poem, the 60th of the *Tiruchchathakam*. He sings:

Enter shall I (the haven of your feet),
 Mine alone are Your feet!
 (If I am prevented from doing so),
 Standing in the midst of the devotees who adore You,
 I shall laugh, looking on Your familiar shoulders,
 Shameless cur as I am.

It is a tradition that an Indian girl does not look at any male, much less stare at any, except her father and brothers. She usually walks about with her eyes fixed on her toes. Staring at the shoulders of a male can only occur if he happens to be a lover, a lover of long standing, and that too in the privacy of their chamber. Kamban makes Seethaa in *Mithilai-kaatchi-padalam* to sink her glances on the shoulders of Ram.

The pair of sharp glances called her glance
 Sank deep in shoulders broad of handsome Ram.

Seethaa is an exception just as, long before her, Maanicka-vaacagar, Sivakaami of our *Tiruvempavai*, was an excep-

tion. *Tiruththolnakkam*, then, is a situation or 'thurai' in the love-play of Mannickavaacagar and the Lord.

The next decad, *Tirupponnoosal* can well be a game of little girls, but *Annaippaththu*, *Kuyirppaththu*, *Tiruththasaangam*, and *Tiruppalliezhuchchi*, cannot be girls' games. Of course, it goes without saying that the *Koil-mooththa-tiruppathikam* and the *Koil-tiruppathikam* could never have been games of little girls. It seems to me, therefore, that it does not seem to be correct to lump all the sixteen pathikams or even the fourteen pathikams ending with *Tiruppalliezhuchi* as games of little girls. These are all special situations or *thurais* specially thought up by Maanickavaacagar to give expression to his love, a love more than human, for the Lord of Perunthurai. Let us take one poem from each of these sixteen decads and trace the birth, growth and consummation of this passionless passion of the Lord's bride. These sixteen decads are capable of being divided into two sections, one comprising the 10 decads from *Tiruvempaavai* to *Tirupponnoosal*, and the other comprising the remaining six decads from *Annaippaththu* to the *Koil-tiruppathikam*. The first section is a moving first person account of the secret courtship, *kalaviyal*, the second is an account of the public declaration, the *karpial* of *The Tirukknral*.

The heroine, the *thalaivi*, the bride-to-be of the Lord, has not yet entered her teens. But she has already fallen in love with Maadevan. She has not confided in anyone. Her companions come to her doors loudly singing the praises of Maadevan. She is in that state of ecstatic love when even the mention of her lover's name sends a thrill through every fibre of her body. As soon as the strains of the song of Maadevan reach her ears, she falls into a swoon.

She had, however, through sheer exuberance of love, on occasions, given away her secret. Her words are now used by her companions to torment her. She pretends absolute unconcern and would not accompany them to join in singing Maadevan's praises. She cannot trust herself to do so without altogether betraying her secret. But her friends are importunate. "You alone are fit to do so, do therefore in rapture melt and sing for us and all the world a song of thy Lord", beseeches one companion, while another entreats her to sing of Him "Who from time everlasting is the first of beings and the only One".

How Indeed Could One Praise Him ?

Willing yet unwilling, eager yet hesitant, she finds an excuse in His immeasurable greatness and turns on her companions with the impatient question, "How indeed could one praise Him?" For,

Far beneath the seven nether regions
 And ineffable are His blossom feet ;
 His flower-laden crown is all knowledge's end ;
 A Lady by him is His form, but not the only one ;
 Though the Vedaas, the heaven-dwellers
 And all the world sing His praise,
 Praises fall short of Him, our unique Companion,
 Dweller in His devotees :
 Therefore, Oh ye of blameless lineage,
 Handmaidens of Haran's shrine,
 What is His city ? What His name ?
 Who His kin ? Who are not ?
 How sing we His praise ?

Nevertheless Him Form Will I Sing

Her companions would not be put off. "Oh beautiful gazelle, sing His feet, the source of grace", they beseech her. And she sings. Over feature after feature of his face and form she dwells with loving reminiscence and sings to her heart's rejoicing.

The fragmentary moon adorning her Lord's head is the first feature which comes to her mind. Its cool brilliance is ever present before her eyes. It is one insignia which none else has a right to wear. It is His sole prerogative. How many times without number has she seen it on hill-tops and in the valleys as He went about His domain! When He sped to her in the gloaming darkness to keep the tryst, as He wended His way down the hill through winding paths and even pathless ways, the crescent moon flashed in and out of the latticed foliage, now far, now near, but ever assuring her of His presence and speedy coming. If for a brief moment – for what seemed like eternity – this beacon of joy was hid from her eyes while perhaps He pushed His way through aisled courses of mountain streams, she could still always hear Him. He delighted in singing the enthralling sonorous songs of the Saama Vedaa. Even while she went about the day's chores under the stern eyes of her mother, her ears would keep eternal commune with Him.

Lost in the reverie of these delights of the eye and the ear, she forgot her fears, she forgot her companions, she forgot everything except her Beloved. With a secret joy suffusing her young face, with shining eyes searching the expanse of the hills before her for the flash of the crescent moon in the misty morning, with ears deaf to all

sounds but the strains of His music, she lifts her voice and sings. Her companions and the world itself were silenced into amazed wonderment.

He with the crescent moon, the bard of the Vedaas,
Lord of this vast domain,

He with the thread of (several) strands across his body,
On stately steed He rides; dusky is His throat,
Red golden His form, ashes white thereon;
First in all worlds is He :

Bliss unceasing –

The traditional boon –

To His veteran devotees He gives.

That all the world may amazed be,

Let me beholding Him sing.

8-9

Two And Two Make One

She has irrevocably lost her heart to Him. “My love is to Paranjyoti”, she blurts out. She unceasingly thinks, dreams, speaks of Him alone. She loves to lisp His names, all of her own secret christening. *Aththan*, *Aananadan*, *Amudan*, she would roll these names round her tongue, tasting them like sweets till their honeyed sweetness melted and filled her mouth. But He was still a riddle to her. He seemed now this, now that, always paradoxical pairs of opposites. Her heart was sore puzzled as He eluded her understanding. Now singing of Him feature by loved feature, her puzzlement increases till she can bear it no longer and must confide in her companions. Even as the words issue haltingly out of her sweet lips, the riddle is solved and her heavy clouded heart is illumined by divine understanding. Realisation of His catalytic quality comes to her in one inspired illumined flash. For when He enters (the heart) as the Lord of love, He,

Melts the very bones,
 Renders the two - fold deeds (karma) powerless ;
 Weeds out the rooted griefs,
 Purifies (sense of) dualities,
 So that all that has gone before perish entire.

40-3

So she exultingly sings,

For Him who is the Vedaas and sacrifices too,
 For him Who is the real and unreal as well,
 For Him who is enlightenment
 And ignorance dark besides,
 For Him Who is sorrow and bliss too,
 For Him Who is the half, Who is the whole as well,
 For Him Who is bondage and liberation,
 For Him Who is the first and the last,
 For His annointment pound we the golden powder. 9-20

His Infinite Condescending Grace

Immediately a sense of her utter unworthiness assails her. Simultaneously, wonder at her good fortune and gratitude to Him for His infinite grace overwhelms her. She realises only too well that her love cannot stand comparison with Kannappan's immeasurable love. But with a wry humour she sees that she too is beyond comparison, if only for her mite of a love. No one could have less. Forthwith her heart swells with joy and she sings :

Love like Kannappan's He did not find in me,
 Yet my Sire, by my own measure,
 Me too graciously accepted,
 And ceremoniously commanded me, "Come hither" :
 To that flood of grace —
 Him with that golden form ash - covered —
 Go hum your song, Oh king of dragon - flies (my heart) (10-4)

The Meeting

She had so long worshipped Him from afar. Just a glimpse of the flashing crescent moon ; his sweet voice wafted in the wind ; a blue patch on His throat, black against the golden skin ; glimpses of these are her only acquaintance with Him. Even so, she had lost her heart to Him and had never thereafter even a fleeting glance for anyone else. All she had seen so far of Him were as good as not having seen Him. Now she is to meet him. She meets Him face to face. Just as Seethaa, the while she feigned to trim her bangles, stole a glance at Ramaa and shed her doubts, assured that he who stood before her was the same one whom she had seen from her balcony and had lost her heart to, similarly our Lord's bride receives confirmation and sings,

The Lord of this beautiful vast domain,
 After He severed the root of my birth's seedling,
 On none else have I set eyes ;
 Formless (then), now a form He wears,
 Singing the beautiful city he graces,
 Let us proclaim our clear confirmation. 11-2

The references to the vast domain and the city are to God without and God within ; the vast domain being the worlds upon worlds and the city being the city of the heart. This will be clear from the succeeding two decads.

God Without

Aldous Huxley in his *Perennial Philosophy* says :

“ ‘That art Thou’ : ‘Behold but one in all things’ God Within and God Without There is a way to Reality in and through the soul, and there is a way to Reality

in and through the world. Whether the ultimate goal can be reached by following either of the ways to the exclusion of the other is to be doubted. The third, best and hardest way is that which leads to the Divine Ground simultaneously in the perceiver and in that which is perceived”.

Our Lord's Bride can but choose the “best and hardest” way and, therefore, she beholds God Without and God Within. With awe she looks at His vast domain and beholds God Without – Him whom Maanickavaacagar elsewhere hails thus :

“Permeating all things, each one He cherishes, behold Him”

Our Lord's bride proclaims this in song thus :

What He smears is white ash ;

What He wears is an angry snake ;

What He speaks with His lips divine

Is the mystic word, it seems, my dear :

What matters what He smears, what He says, what He wears ?

The Lord of the universe, of all that has life,

The essence is He.

12-1

God Within

“Though God is everywhere present,” says *William Law* (quoted by *Aldous Huxley* in his ‘*Perennial Philosophy*’) “yet He is only present to thee in the deepest and most central part of thy soul. The natural senses cannot possess God or unite thee to Him; nay, thy inward faculties of understanding, will and memory can only reach after God, but cannot be the place of His habitation in thee. But there is a root or depth of thee from where all these faculties come forth, as lines from a centre or as branches from the body of a tree. This depth is called the centre, the fund or the bottom of the soul. This depth is the unity, the eternity – I had almost

said the infinity— of thy soul ; for it is so infinite that nothing can satisfy it or give it rest but the infinity of God.”

“God Within and God Without”, *goes on Aldous Huxley to explain*, “these are two abstract notions which can be entertained by the understanding and expressed in words. But the fact to which these notions refer cannot be realised and experienced except in ‘the deepest and the most central part of the soul’. And this is true no less of God Without than of God Within”.

Accordingly, the Lord’s bride proceeds to realise no less God Within than God Without in the deepest and most central part of her soul. Hence her song :

(After) Many a day praising Him and serving Him,
The Great One, His blossom feet, in my heart He planted ;
And as beauteous Flame,
Tearing the fibres of my stony heart,
He took me under His sway ;
How His twin feet turned into gold,
Let us sing and gather flowers for Him. 13-9

His Prowess

Realising God Within in the deepest and most central part of her soul, she sings of His great prowess :

Two arrows we saw not — in Ekambar’s hand !
One arrow — three cities — bounce for joy !
And one also was too many ! bounce for joy ! * 1432

* This refers to the destruction of the *thiri - puram*, the three cities symbolising the three *malams*, accretions — *aanavam*, *mayai*, *Kanmam*—which taint the soul. The Lord did not even use the arrow which He fixed to His bow. In His grace, He just laughed at them and lo ! they were forthwith destroyed.

Open Avowal.

Thus her passion progresses, grows, fills her being and can no longer be contained in secrecy. Posing as one moved by compassion, He has entered her heart and enslaved her, and has made her the target of public slander.

The point of no return has been crossed. Her plight overpowers her reticence and modesty and impels her to rush into the presence of her Beloved to shamelessly declare her passion, unmindful of the assemblage round Him. She rushes in dancing in ecstatic joy and longingly sinks her glance on His shoulders. So unbecoming of a modest demure maiden. Utterly shameless, senseless baring of her heart-locked secret. But she could not help it. Her love would not be contained any longer. She need not speak. Her immodest stare speaks volumes. Elsewhere, Maanickavaacagar sings :

Enter shall I, — mine alone are your sacred feet :
 Standing amidst saints that adore You,
 I shall laugh, staring at Your familiar shoulders,
 Immodest cur as I am.

Here the Lord's bride sings with utter abandon :

Pride we have lost, wisdom we have forgot,
 Ye maidens fair !
 We think but of the anklet-girt feet of Him,
 Lord of the South, Whom the heaven adores !
 The Rapturous Dancer's grace if we, His slaves, obtain,
 Forthwith in rapture lost,
 Shall we dance gazing on His shoulders !

15-8

Thus every true lover of God has to publicly proclaim his love so that his passion may be purified and trans-

formed into passionless passion. Maanickavaacagar relates the experience of this transformation in the last poem of this decad thus :

Let us sing
 Of the ineffable Inner Light,
 The Most Mighty entering my heart ;
 Of the crossing of the shoreless vast sea of lust ;
 Of the headlong flight of the craving senses—vultures—
 Robbed of their prey ;
 Of the destruction of their eyrie too ;
 Let us sing and dance gazing on His shoulders. 15-14

Swing Ye Low, Swing Ye High

The point of no return has been crossed. A new fear assails her now. She sinks into despair. Will he accept her or spurn her and her love ? Her heart reassures her. 'Fear not, He will assuredly accept you', says the heart. What will be the sign ? He will sever the cycle of death and birth. Reassured, she and her heart swing in delirious joy and sing :

Poison – sedimented throat has He ;
 Lord of the heavenly ones is He ;
 From Uttarakosamangai's gem-like cloud-capped mansion
 He will come with Her whose words are music,
 And in His slave's heart take abode :
 Elixir of deathlessness will well up in our hearts,
 As He, in His grace, sunders the bonds of death and birth:
 Let us His holy praises sing,
 Oh ye who wear rows of bracelets white,
 And swing in the golden swing.

15-4

Here ends the secret courtship.

Public Declaration and Union

Their love has become the talk of the whole town. It cannot be very long before the mother of the Lord's bride comes to hear of it. Before this happens, she must be told, she must be confided in; her blessings, her invaluable wisdom, understanding and help should be secured. The Lord's bride, therefore, seeks her mother when she is alone. Tongue-tied, guilty, shame and shyness two shackles on her feet, she is driven forward by love and sheer necessity. As she nears her mother, she rushes forward and in a sudden close embrace buries her face in her mother's ample bosom, and, between muffled sobs, cries, 'Mother'.

Eternal Bridegroom, the Utterly Beautiful,
 Since He fills her heart, she could only cry, 'Mother'!
 He who dwells in her heart -
 The Southerner, the vast domain's Lord -
 Since He is her Lord—Bliss Incarnate -
 She could only cry 'Mother!' 17-3

Invitation

Though she only cried 'Mother' and could say nothing else, her mother, a person of perfect understanding, divined her daughter's secret and bade her send for Him. The Lord's bride rushes out in great joy to entreat the *kuyil*, lovers' winged messenger, to call Him hither. She begs the *kuyil*:

Oh *kuyil* small that does frequent
 The grove with honey-sweet rich fruit,
 Pay heed to this:
 The bounteous Lord Who, spurning the heavens,
 Entered this earth, and made men His own,

The only One Who, disregarding the flesh,
 Entered my heart and my sentient life became,
 The Bridegroom of Her
 Who won Him with gentle eyes that excel the fawn's,
 Do you go and bid Him come hither. 18-4

State Arrival^c

He comes, He comes in state, and she would proclaim His heraldry ; but in His presence she becomes tongue-tied. But her mother and her people should know His name and fame ; His kingdom, capital, river and range ; His steed and arms ; His war drum and favourite flower, and His banner. She therefore turns to her loquacious parrot to whom on many a lonesome wistful night she had repeated item by loved item His sweet name and proud fame, and begs the bird to announce Him.

She would not, however, have her mother and kinsmen think that she had taught the parrot His name. "Speak His name", she commands the bird, "recollecting what you have heard Brahmaa and Vishnu address Him".

Parrot fair and young !
 Recollect and tell the renowned sacred name
 Of our Lord of vast domain, - ' Aarooran, Semperumaan ' —
 Or as you have heard Brahmaa and Vishnu say,
 ' Milord, Overlord of the gods '. 19-1

He is arisen in me

Aldous Huxley quotes the following extracts in his *Perennial Philosophy* :

Goodness needeth not to enter the soul, for it is there already; only it is unperceived.

— *The Theologica Germanica*

“When the ten thousand things are viewed in their oneness,
we return to the Origin and remain where we have always been.”

— *Sen T'sen*

and proceeds to explain as follows:

“It is because we don't know who we are, because, we are unaware that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, that we behave in the ways that are so characteristically human. We are saved, we are liberated, enlightened by perceiving the hitherto unperceived good that is already within us, by returning to our eternal Ground and remaining where, without knowing it, we have always been.”

Immediately on the advent of her Beloved, the Lord's bride experiences this same revelation which Aldous Huxley speaks of, and communicates it to her people. Him, Whom she could describe so far in vague phrases only, such as ‘the flavour of the fruit’, or ‘ambrosia’, or ‘lo! it is difficult to apprehend’, or ‘O, it is so simple’, or ‘even the immortals know not’, she could now with assurance affirm, “This is He, this His beautiful form”. She has realised in herself the truth of the doctrines ‘*tat twam asi*’ ‘that art thou’. She has gained the unitive knowledge of the Divine Ground. Therefore she sings:

That it is the flavour of the fruit,
That it is ambrosia,
That it can rarely be known, yet is so easy of access,
Even the immortals know not.
Oh Dweller in Uttarakosamangai's sweet-perfumed groves,
Who has assumed sway over us
And has in Your grace come hither,
That we may declare,
‘This is His sacred form, this is He’,

What is Your will for our service ?

That we shall heed :

Our Mighty Lord, arise in us.

20-7

Show Me A Sign

All saints, prophets, sages, enlightened ones, have all down the ages received a sign – a proof of the Lord arising in one's heart. Rev. Pope translates the sub-title of this decad as 'Eternal Reality'. For the sign is the seal of a covenant; it is the dispeller of the dread of being forsaken. It is the conferment of eternal bliss. The Lord's bride too asks for such a sign.

The Mistress dwells in midmost of Yourself,

Within the Mistress centred you dwell,

Oh our Primal Lord, Whose being knows no end,

Who dwells in the sacred golden hall of my heart,

Midst of Your servant if both of You really dwell,

Ever give me, your servant, the grace

Amidst Your lowliest servants to abide,

That my heart's purpose may be fulfilled.

21-1

Dying to self

The consummation of passionless passion is the consummation of the self. This is the law to which saints all over the world and all down the ages have borne testimony, as the following extracts quoted by Aldous Huxley in his *Perennial Philosophy* will show.

The beloved is all in all; the lover merely veils him;

The beloved is all that lives, the lover a dead thing.

— *Jalal-ud-din Rumi*

My me is God, nor do I recognise any other me
except my God Himself.

— *St. Catherine of Genoa*

Our Lord's bride 'dies to her self' singing thus :

This day in grace to me,
 You rise in my heart, -
 A sun bidding the darkness flee !
 On this Your nature manifest
 I thought till all thought ceased to be.
 Your '*None but Youkness*' goes forth,
 Goes forth into all things
 As atom by infinitesimal atom till You alone are :
 Oh Civan who dwells in the vast domain,
 No indicatable particular thing You are,
 You apart none are !
 Who can indeed know You ?

22-3

Thus Maanickavaacagar loved and gained the Lord, and he has bequeathed to us his first-hand account of the One Reality which he was able to apprehend. Let us be worthy of this priceless heritage, and through his blessings become loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit so that we too may be possessed by this passionless passion and die to our self to become alive to the Kingdom of God within us, where, without knowing it, we have always been.

When the self has been consumed and God alone is, Maanickavaacagar is able to sing exultingly :

You gave Yourself to me and took me in exchange ;
 Oh Sankara, who, indeed, is the clever one of us two?
 Endless bliss I gained, what did You gain from me ?
 Oh Mighty Lord Who has taken my mind as Your shrine,
 Oh Civan Who abides in Tirupperunthurai,
 Oh my Father, Oh Lord of the Universe,
 My body you have taken as Your abode,
 To this I have nothing to offer in return.

22-10

III

The “deep, luminous and absorbing experience of love” spoken of by Thomas Merton reaches its climax in the line,

“You gave Yourself to me and took me in exchange”

The last stanza of the *Koil-tiruppathikam* which commences with this line, in fact, the entire *Koil-tiruppathikam* belongs not to the third type of contemplation of Merton but to what he calls the ‘next step’. ‘the next step which is not a step’.

Since I have built this interpretation of *The Tiruvaacagam* round Thomas Merton’s definitions and description of various types and stages of contemplation, and since there is no other clearer exponent than him of the most sublime and ultimate experience of the contemplative, bar the beatific vision, I make no apology for quoting in extenso his summing up of the three types of contemplation and of his description of what is beyond them. Merton goes on to say :

“In all these three beginnings you remain aware of yourself as being on the threshold of something more or less indefinite. In the second, you are scarcely conscious of it at all ; you only have a vague, unutterable sense that peace underlies the darkness and aridity in which you find yourself. You scarcely dare admit it to yourself, but, in spite of all your misgivings, you realise that you are going somewhere and that your journey is guided and that you can feel safe.

“In the third, you are in the presence of a more definite and more personal Love, Who invades your

mind and will in a way you cannot grasp, eluding every attempt on your part to contain and hold Him by any movement of your own soul. You know that this "Presence" is God. But for the rest He is hidden in a cloud, although He is so near as to be inside you and outside you and all round you.

"When this contact with God deepens and becomes more pure, the cloud thins. In proportion as the cloud gets less opaque, the experience of God opens out inside you as a terrific emptiness. What you experience is the emptiness and purity of your own faculties, produced in you by a created effect of God's love. Nevertheless, since it is God Himself Who directly produces this effect and makes Himself known by it, without any other intermediary, the experience is more than purely subjective and does tell you something about God that you cannot know in any other way.

"These effects are intensified by the light of understanding, infused into your soul by the Spirit of God and raising it suddenly into an atmosphere of dark, breathless clarity in which God, though completely defeating and baffling all your natural understanding, becomes somehow obvious.

"However, in all these things you remain very far from God, much farther than you realise. And there are always two of you. There is yourself and there is God making Himself known to you by these effects.

"BUT as long as there is this sense of separation, this awareness of distance and difference between ourselves and God, we have not yet entered into the fulness of contemplation.

“As long as we only stand on the threshold of the abyss of purity and emptiness that is God, we are still infinitely far from God, and the grace still teach us little of Him

“From our side of the threshold this darkness, this emptiness, look deep and vast – and exciting. There is nothing we can do about entering in. We cannot force our way over the edge, although there is no barrier.

“But the reason is perhaps that there is also no abyss.

“There you remain, somehow feeling that the next step will be a plunge and you will find yourself flying in interstellar space.

“When the next step comes, you do not take the step, you do not know the transition, you do not fall into anything. You do not go anywhere, and so you do not know the way by which you got there or the way by which you come back afterwards. You are certainly not lost. You do not fly. There is no space or there is all space; it makes no difference.

“The next step is not a step.

“You are not transported from one degree to another.

“What happens is that the separate entity that is you apparently disappears and nothing seems to be left but a pure freedom indistinguishable from infinite Freedom, love identified with Love. Not two loves, one waiting for the other, striving for the other, but Love Loving in Freedom.

“Would you call this experience? I think you might say that this only becomes an experience in a man's

memory. Otherwise it seems wrong to even speak of it as something that happens. Because things that happen have to happen to some subject, and experiences have to be experienced by someone. But here the subject of any divided or limited or creature experience seems to have vanished. You are not you, you are fruition. If you like, you do not have an experience, you become Experience; but that is entirely different, because you no longer exist in such a way that you can reflect on yourself or see yourself having an experience, or judge what is going on, if it can be said that something is going on that is not eternal and unchanging and an activity so tremendous that it is infinitely still.

“And here all adjectives fall to pieces. Words are stupid. Everything you say is misleading – unless you list every possible experience and say: ‘This is not what it is. This is not what I am talking about’.

“Metaphor has now become hopeless altogether. Talk about “darkness” if you must; but the thought of darkness is already too dense and too coarse. You can speak of “emptiness” but that makes you think of floating round in space; and this is nothing spatial.

“What it is, is freedom. It is perfect love. It is pure renunciation. It is the fruition of God.

“It is not freedom ushering in some subject; it is not love as an action dominated by an impulse germane to one’s own being; it is not renunciation that plans and executes itself after the manner of a virtue.

“It is freedom living and circulating in God. Who is Freedom. It is love loving in Love. It is the purity of God rejoicing in His own liberty.

“And here, when contemplation becomes what it is really meant to be, it is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject, so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God.”

I would not have reproduced such a long quotation if it were not utterly germane to my subject and if I did not feel that I could not give expression in my own words to that which Thomas Merton speaks of with such lucidity out of his own personal experience.

Let us cull some key words and phrases from the above quotation.

“The next step is not a step”

“What happens is that the separate entity that is you apparently disappears and nothing seems to be left but a pure freedom indistinguishable from infinite freedom”

“What it is, is freedom, It is perfect love. It is pure renunciation”.

“IT IS THE FRUITION OF GOD”.

“Contemplation is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject, so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God.”

It will be clear that Maanickavaacagar relates exactly such an experience when he sings :

You gave Yourself to me, and took me in exchange,

 Oh Mighty Lord Who has taken my mind as Your
 shrine, ...
 My body You have taken as Your abode.

In fact, the entire *Koil-Tiruppathikam* is the relation of exactly such an experience of the 'next step which is no step' in sweet Tamil songs of great melody and greater depth of significance.

This is the *Jeewan - muktaa* state, the state in which, according to Maanickavaacagar himself, saints, who, abandoning all activities and casting off their bonds, in freedom dwell, and everlastingly perceive the Lord in themselves. My hypothetical third part of *The Tiruvaacagam* ends with Maanickavaacagar attaining this state, which, in the words of Merton, is God living in God. This is the mystical union, in which, Merton says, "God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally one Spirit". This is the *nirvikalpa samaadhi*.

In that moment when the Lord, in condescending grace, delivers Himself to the mystic, he is filled with God—he is God.

That rare moment is for ever captured in the outburst of rapture with which Maanickavaacagar concludes the *Tiru-anda-p - pahuthi*, the 3rd decad. He sings :

I know not what to say.
 Blessed be You. Is this proper ?

Ah me, a mere cur, I cannot sustain this :
 What You to me has done, I cannot comprehend.
 Ah, I am dead. To me, Your slave,
 What You in Your grace has given, I know not ;
 With mere sipping, I am not content ;
 (Greedily) swallowing, I cannot take it in.
 The rich cool sea of milk in flowing billows swells
 Like the new-moon mid-ocean tide
 And fills my soul to overflowing.
 It beggars description.
 In each hair-root of my body,
 Ambrosia sweet to collect He ordained.
 Within this cur's frame,
 Through every fibre of this wretch's fleshy body,
 Through honey-filled wondrous ambrosial capillaries,
 He irrigated right to the cavities of the bones ;
 And as if with my melting heart he fashioned a new form,
 An ecstasy-bubbling body he created for me.
 Ultimately, He made me be even like the complacent elephant
 Which had fed on choice sugar-cane and wood-apples.
 Thus, when in me Mercy's pure honey he mixed,
 He made me, in His grace, surpassing ambrosia sweet,
 He of a nature which neither Brahma nor Vishnu know.

(Lines 163-182)

In the 20th decad, the *Tiruppalliezhuchchi*, the heroine,
 the *thalaivi*, or the *naayaki* of the hypothetical third part of
The Tiruvaacagam prays God to rise in her heart. She
 sings :

That it is the flavour of the fruit,
 That it is ambrosia,
 That it can rarely be known, yet is so easy of access,
 Even immortals know not,
 Oh Dweller in Uttarakosamangai's sweet perfumed groves,

Who has assumed sway over us
 And has in Your grace come hither
 That we may declare,
 'This is His sacred form, This is He,'
 What is Your will for our service ?
 That we shall heed ;
 Our Mighty Lord, arise in us.

20-7

In the next decad, our heroine, Sivakaami as we agreed to call her, asks for a sign as proof of His having arisen in her. You remember that she sang thus :

The Mistress dwells in midmost of You,
 Within the Mistress, centered You dwell,
 Oh our Primal Lord whose being knows no end,
 Who dwells in the sacred golden hall (of my heart),
 If in the core of Your servant both of You indeed dwell,
 Ever give me Your servant the grace
 Amidst Your servants to abide,
 That my heart's purpose may be fulfilled.

21-1

This sign which Maanickavaacagar asks for is very significant. In the first decad, the *Civapuraanam*, a poem of 95 lines, there is only one plea contained in less than one line, placed almost in the middle of that poem, in line 43. He beseeches the Lord to induct him into the Lord's *thozhumbu*, chosen band of servitors, devotees. This plea is repeated elsewhere too. In line 181 of the 5th decad, the *Tiruchchathakam*, he pleads "call me and enlist me among Your devotees". His plea does not go in vain. He is admitted into the galaxy of the Lord's devotees. This seems a miracle to him. He feels that it is true, but he had not dared to hope that his desire would be fulfilled. Therefore, in ten songs of wonderment he expresses his amazement at his good fortune and God's measureless

grace. Thus in the 26th decad, called 'Decad of Wonderment' (*Athicayappathu*), all the stanzas end with the refrain, 'We saw the wonder of our Lord enslaving me and admitting me in His band of devotees'. Thus the 8th stanza runs :

The upstanding flaming Effulgence
 Firstly, banishing me that I may not stand in His presence,
 And making me enter a human body,
 (Later), graciously looked at me
 And with one subtle brief word,
 Like ploughing in concentric circles
 Without aid of a yoke,
 He lifted me up,
 And cleansing me that all the past false life I led may cease,
 Made me (bliss incarnate), enslaved me,
 And inducted me into the fold of His devotees :
 This never-before-seen thing we witnessed.* 26-8

Who are these servitors of the Lord? What is their special merit that Maanickavaacagar should make the admission to their circle the only plea in his *Tiruvaacagam*? They are not any and every devotee. They are the servitors referred to in line 130 of decad 2 which runs as follows :

"The servitors, recipients of (the Lord's) grace,
 Who accompanied (Him) that day"

* This is a difficult and abstruse stanza. The words "Like ploughing without a yoke" mean that God is capable of achieving His ends without requisite instruments; compare with the words, "Without seeds you will grow crops" in stanza 96 of decad 5.

"One subtle brief word" = Om.

"Made me"—the words "bliss incarnate" are borrowed by the translator from the phrase 'civam aakki' in 1st stanza of decad 51.

The phrase 'never-before-seen thing' is a literal translation of the word 'adicayam' which is a corruption of the sanskrit word 'adrisya'.

“That day” refers to the never-to-be-forgotten day on which the Lord came as a *guru* at Tirupperunthurai to assume lordship over Maanickavaacagar. These servitors are the *Jeevan-muktaas*, those who have already gained the feet of the Lord and have been freed from the cycle of births and deaths.

Sekkilaar, the great biographer of the saints of Tamilnaadu, thus records Lord Civan’s own words addressed to Sundarar extolling the qualities of His Holy Galaxy of Servitors :

In their glory themselves they equal,
 By devotion they appropriate Me,
 By union with Me they conquer the world,
 Failings they have none any longer ;
 Established in unique state they are ;
 Through their love they enjoy bliss ;
 Duality they have transcended ;
 Do you go and join them.

(Stanza 196 of Thaduththaatkonda Puraanam)

Within this brief stanza there lies the seed of an elaborate thesis on the Glory of the Holy Galaxy of Servitors of the Lord. Such a thesis we find in Sekkilaar’s chronicle itself, in the prologue to the work. Thus Sekkilaar sings :

In the lovely temple where abides the Lord of the heavenly host—
 He Who took residence in the ant-hill, the Primordial Lord—
 In its effulgent beauteous court,
 Adjoining the portals of the surrounding ancient ramparts,

Lies the holy chamber called ‘DEVASIRIYAN’,
 Ceaselessly filled with Brahmaa, the flower seated one,
 Indra and Vishnu—in whose wide chest
 Resides She, the lotus-dweller—and other heavenly ones besides.

It resembled several thousands of Seas of Milk,
 Filled as it was by the pure effulgence of the sacred white ash
 On the bodies of the sorrow-dispelling devotees,
 And by the resonance of the talisman—the Mystic Five Letters:

It resembled the world entire,
 As the entire world was gathered therein,
 Deeming that those who worship the feet of Him,
 The Cause of all, are entitled to rule the world.

Chosen by the Father and publicly given the accolade of Servitude,
 Their bodies prickling and hearts palpitating with love,
 Bounden to do sacred service with their hands,
 These and countless others besides,

Men as pure inside as the ash
 Smeared on their spotless frames resplendent with gems ;
 By their effulgence they lit up every side,
 And shone with ineffable glory.

Even if the elements five their balance lose in chaos,
 Never forget they the blossom—feet of Him with the Lady as his twin,
 But stand steadfast by strength of far-famed path of love ;
 Great Rocks of blameless character.

Endowed with eternal riches which never wax or wane,
 Alms-bowl and red gold both with equanimity they view ;
 They shone with resolve which with welling love sought only to
 [adore,
 And sought not deliverance at all.

Wooden beads their necklace, rags their robe,
 Their duty none other but God's service ;
 Full of compassionate love, they lacked nothing :
 How can I describe their resoluteless ?

Of mien and garb as fancy dictates,
 Unique servitors of the Dancing Lord
 Of age-long fame ; how shall I
 Here praise or sing their state ?

**Sri C. K. Subrahmaniam Mudaliar, the peerless devotee and
 commentator of Sekkilaar, has said thus: “ Admission to**

the Galaxy of the Servitors (of the Lord) is stated in Saiva Siddhaantaa as the acme of Siva's Grace ”.

This is deliverance here and here-after.

Maanickavaacagar's entire *Tiruvaacagam* is a plea for admission to this assembly. 'Initiate me in Your assembly of servitors' he pleads to his Lord. This entreaty is the axis of his *Civa-puraanam* even as the Mystic Mantra 'Nama Civaaya' is the axis of the Yajur Veda.

Elsewhere in '*Tiruchchataham*' (verse 46) he sings:

“Would He call unworthy me too to His fold of devotees?”

This is Maanickavaacagar's heart's desire. This is his single plea in the whole of *Tiruvaacagam*. This is indeed *Tiruvaacagam*'s theme. This is what he gained, when he attained the *Jeewan - muktaa* state.

The object of the contemplative has been achieved. The union with God has been attained. The present birth in human form has served its purpose. It is a mistaken notion that the Hindu ascetic curses his body and fulminates against it. The *Tirumandhiram* tells him that the human body is the temple of God and exhorts him to treat it with respect. Manaickavaacagar himself sings that even

Saints, who, abandoning all activities, their bonds cast off,
In freedom dwell and everlastingly perceive Him in themselves
They all have come as maidens with beauteous dark eyes
To worship You in the manner of human beings,
Oh Bridegroom of the awe - inspiring Goddess.

20 - 6

He also says that Brahmaa and Vishnu long to be born on this earth, for it is the earth alone where Civan's grace is wont to save. Birth in the human body is essential for release for ever from the cycle of births. The

human body has to be well looked after till the objective is achieved.

A scaffolding is necessary when a building is being erected, but thereafter? In the same manner, a body is indispensable till the *Jeewan - muktaa* state has been attained, but thereafter? Let Tiruvalluvar answer. He says :

Even the body is too much for those who are engaged in severing the chain of births ; why then other attachments ?

The body which was an asset so long has become a liability as soon as the *Jeewan-muktaa* state has been attained, as soon as the mystic union with God has been achieved. Liable as it is to disease and decay, to pain and putrefaction, the *Jeewan-muktaa* now longs for release from the body, longs for death. He has obtained, it is true, supreme bliss, but still evanescent bliss ; he has obtained union with God, but still not eternal union. The mystic lives with a dread for companion, the dread of losing the bliss, the ecstatic union with God. For, as Thomas Merton says: "there is no infallible way of guaranteeing the mystic against every mistake ; he can never be perfectly sure of any human technique". So the *Jeewan-muktaa* now longs for death, for release from this human body, for eternal bliss and union everlasting.

So, the next decad, the first in my hypothetical fourth part of *The Tiruvaacagam*, is the *Ceththilaa-p-paththu*, the decad of "I am not yet dead". Maanickavaacagar sings thus even in the first stanza of this decad :

Even after parting from Your new blossom-like twin feet,
Which, making my heart melt, had entered it,
I false and wily one, am not yet dead.

This longing is repeated in three more stanzas in the same decad. Thus in a second stanza :

Overgrown with anthill and trees
 (While they were absorbed in deep contemplation),
 With water and air for food,
 Dwellers in the spheres and others
 have withered seeking You ;
 Oh King whose blossom feet none of them have seen :
 You mesmerized me with one word and caught me :
 For this act of grace, I do not tremble ;
 My hard mind does not melt overmuch :
 Nevertheless, I do not die ;
 I do not kill this undying body ;
 I still keep sojourning here,
 Oh Civan who abides in Tirupperunthurai. 23-2

In one more stanza, he entreats God to make him die, and in a further one, he pleads thus :

Oh Sire ! give me the grace of never parting from You ;
 Oh Lord, show me Your anklet - girt twin feet
 And graciously rid me of this deluding carcass. 23-5

In varying tempo, in varying phrases, this pleading goes on in ascending crescendo. Hear this heart-rending plea from the Decad of Desire.

To the end that this pus-exuding, fly infested,
 Dirt overlaid walking little dwelling (of my soul)
 May be destroyed, call me unto You, Oh my King,
 Oh Dancer, Oh Gem of a Guru,
 Whose role is to guard me
 And assume *lordship over me*.
 Oh God ! Oh unobtainable One to the devaas ! Oh Civan !

I long for You to look at my face a little and say,
 "Ha ! come hither".

Take note of this, Oh Beauteous Great One. 25-3

His longing for eternal union with God now fills his mind
 to the exclusion of every other thought, and he sings
 thus in the Decad of Longing for Union.

When am I to be seated close by Him,
 Locked in an embrace with Him —
 The Sparkling Golden Hill,
 Unpierced Pearl,
 The Abode of Grace —
 Who, pleased with my useless service,
 Assumed lordship over me, the straggling laggard ;
 The Brimming Ambrosia Who gave Himself to me,
 Whom the dark Vishnu and Brahmaa, being hindered,
 Are unable to approach even today,
 My Uncut Gem. 27-1

In the next decad, the ' Decad of Refusal to Live Any
 Longer ', he sings :

Oh Our Transcendent One
 Who has pervaded the earth and the sky,
 Take note, other support than You I have none ;
 Oh You who shine with resplendence,
 Oh King of Civapuram (my body),
 Oh Civan Who abides in Tirupperunthurai,
 Whom shall I blame ? To whom shall I tell my woe
 If You, who assumed Lordship over me,
 Would not show me grace ?
 Take note that I cannot live
 In this wide sea - girt earth ;
 Show me the grace of bidding me come unto You 28-1

In the next decad, the Decad of Plea for Grace he is again at his importunate pleadings. He sings :

Oh Effulgence, Oh Flame,
 Oh Lamp of Encompassing Light,
 Oh Half of the dame of curly tresses and buxom bosom,
 Oh Transcendent One, Oh milk - white ash - smeared One,
 Oh Just One Whom Brahmaa of the lotus
 And Vishnu do not know.
 Oh Magnificent Beginning - of - all - things
 Who appeared under the *kurundha* tree
 In wealthy Tirupperunthurai,
 If this slave calls on You earnestly,
 In Your grace, won't You tell me "don't fear". 29-1

Maanickavaacagar's desire to shed this body, to die has become an obsession with him. Out of the 11 decads which go to make the first sub-section of part four, the 23rd, the 27th, the 28th and the 29th, all are open pleas for death, the death that will confer immortality. Even the 24th decad, the *Adaikkala-p-pathithu*, though a reminder to God by our saint that he is God's protege, is, nevertheless, only a veiled plea for death. The Decad of Wonderment, the *Adhicaya-p-pathithu*, the 26th Decad, is only a reminder to God that the purpose for which the human body was given has been fulfilled and that death should no longer be postponed.

God in His abounding grace now bestows on Maanickavaacagar the beatific vision. He was vouchsafed the vision on two occasions, once in Tirukkazhukkundram, and again in Thillai, the Chidambaram of our days. He exultingly sings thus of the beatific vision in the Decad of Tirukkazhukk undram :

Oh Perunthurai's Mighty Lord of unvarying disposition,
 Oh Matchless Bliss to those who speak Your names,
 On my attaining equanimity towards my karma —
 Good or bad —

You came forward and, wiping away my on-coming sorrows,*
 Showed me in Kazhukkundru Your measurless form,
 So that the never desiccating[†] seed of birth
 May not sprout again.

What was the nature of Maanickavaacagar's beatific vision? He describes it thus in the second decad :

Were I to tell you the guise in which
 The Chieftain of Mahendra hill
 In the mountain associated with the Vedaas —
 He of limitless magnificence, the Lord of grace —
 Enslaved us,
 On His holy form of power and indwelling beauty,
 Lines of the sacred ash showed outstandingly ;
 The bliss which sunders root and branch all foibles
 Was His royal road ;
 The cosmic sound of the Onkharāa
 From the drum of the very great Lord of mercy
 With the dame as one half of Him
 Was resounding everywhere ;
 He who enslaves one,
 That one may not be tainted by the three *malams*,
 Was holding in His hand the three-pronged spear ;
 The spark-emitting Effulgence of pure core,
 Who severs the three *malams*,
 Becoming my beloved,
 Was wearing the garland of *Kazhuneer* flowers
 To great advantage as most becoming Him :

* "on-coming sorrows" = Karma accruing in the present birth.

What shall I say of the manner in which He –
Whom Vishnu along with Brahmaa cannot assess –
Rode the steed :

He, who graciously bestows
The path of no return (to the cycle of births),
Deemed *Paandinaadu* itself as His ancient domain :
He, who lifts to the loftiest of lofty states
Those servitors who are devoted to Him,
Had *uththarakosamangai* as His capital :

‘ Devadevan who showered grace

On even primal deities ’

Was His holy name :

The bliss that drives away all ignorance was His steed :

The greatness of His condescendingly showing grace

To all creatures was His mountain throne.

(lines 100 to 124 of decad 2)

Such was the nature of the beatific vision which was graciously vouchsafed to Maanickavaacagar. The Lord always appeared to him as *ammai-appan*, the mother-father form, the form in which the right half was male and the left half was female, indivisibly united, a form of power and mercy. Maanickavaacagar calls this the ancient form. He sings thus in the 10th Decad :

Oh King of the dragon – flies,

Go and, looking at that ancient form,

Buzz softly (my message to Him)

With the skin (of the tiger) and soft silk as garment,

With the ring and the rolled palm leaf

As ear ornaments,

With milk white – ash and the sticky vermilion powder

On the forehead,

With the colourful parrot

And the trident on the shoulders,

And with arlmets to match.

The vision vouchsafed at Thillai was in fulfilment of the promise held out on the occasion when Lord Civan, at the end of the *Guru - disciple* episode in Tirupperunturai, bade Maanickavaacagar stay back and come later to Thillai. Maanickavaacagar refers to this in lines 127, 128 of decad 2 thus :

But He bade me, this cur,
Come to His form - pervading hall
In goodness - abounding Thillai,
And, in His grace, abandoned me here.

Of this vision at Thillai he sings thus :

I, cur of a serf, saw in beauty-encompassed Thillai
The sweet - tasting feet of Him
Who abides in Tiruththuruththi,
Of Him Who, entering me at a time
When I did not know His form,
Established Himself in my heart,
And, correcting my thoughts,
Assumed lordship over me out of His grace. 31 - 3

On having these beatific visions, wisdom and peace descend on the mutinously impatient *Jeevan - muktaa*, impatient for death, impatient to shed the human body. He is in a very much chastened mood in the 32nd decad, the Decad of Prayer. He sings :

By Your grace, is it possible even for this sinner
To merge in the ancient transcendent sea of bliss which You are,
And get the bonds of birth severed
With no trace of life or body
Or sense of me and mine.

32 - 5

Realising the futility of his wilfully and mutinously longing for death in disregard of the divine will, Maanickavaacagar reaches the peak of his spiritual career

in the 33rd decad, the *Kuzhaiththa-p-paththu*, where he surrenders totally and without reservations to the divine will. He gives up the last and the most difficult of all desires – the desire to reach the haven of the feet of the Lord. Such renouncers are called *veedum vcndaa viralin vilanginaar*. In four soul stirring songs, songs of the greatest merit in *The Tiruvaacagam*, Maanickavaacagar testifies to the truth of the Kural with which Tiruvalluvar concludes the section on asceticism. Says Tiruvalluvar :

If one would give up desire which is by nature insatiable,
that would gain one then and there the eternal state.

Maanickavaacagar therefore sings :

What is to be desired for, You know best,
It is You who grants entirely what is desired for,
To Brahmaa and Vishnu, who desire for You,
You are rare to obtain ;
Of Your own volition You assumed lordship over me ;
Whatever at Your pleasure You graciously do,
The same I seek ; but should there remain in me
Any trace of a trait of desiring something
Of my own volition,
Is not that too Your sweet will ?

33-6

He goes a step further and sings :

Oh Lord eternal like a hill,
On that very day when You enslaved me,
Did You not appropriate my soul, body and belongings-
Everything indeed ?
Tell me, Oh Lord with eight shoulders and three eyes,
Can anything stand in my way today ?
Do You good, or do You ill,
Have I mastery over this ?

33-7

One further step in the shedding of desires, and he sings :

Me a cur, the basest of curs, You took a fancy for,
 And of Your own accord enslaved me ;
 Other than leaving in Your hands
 This matter of delusive birth,
 Is it for me to research into it ?
 Is mine the authority here ?
 Thrust me into a body,
 Or set me under Your anklet-girt feet as You please,
 Oh Lord with an eye in the forehead ! 33-8

He reaches the acme of renunciation of desire and sings :

Oh Lord with an eye in the forehead,
 I have to the delight of my eyes
 Beheld Your anklet-girt feet ;
 Henceforth, instead of thinking on them day and night,
 To the exclusion of all other thought,
 Shall I, Oh my Father, brood
 On shedding this body on earth,
 And entering the haven of Your feet ?
 Fine, indeed, is my serfdom to You ! 33-9

Maanickavacagar shed in the last song the very last vestige of desire, and then and there attained the eternal state, the state in which the sense of me and mine has completely ceased to exist in his heart, and God has completely occupied him. In the words of Merton :

“ Here, when contemplation becomes what it is really meant to be, it is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God.”

Here ends the first sub-section of the fourth part of my hypothetical division of *The Tiruvaacagam*. Maanicka-vaacagar no longer looks back, no longer wails and moans, no longer is at war with himself or with God. So far, Maanickavaacagar did not have time for you and me. He was preoccupied solely with his own problems, his war with himself. Now he is filled with supreme peace, supreme bliss. His mission, his concern for the world at large, begins in the next decad, the 34th, the *Uyirunni-p-paththu*. He sings thus :

Oh you who are destitute of any hold,
 Oh You who are on the road to ruin,
 If you would be free of attachments,
 And, taking hold of that hold
 Which has to be taken hold of,
 Would reach the goal which spells good,
 Come rushing up and join those who,
 Learning of the glory of the Lord of Tirupperunthurai—
 He with the crown of matted hair decked with honey-laden flowers—
 Cherish His anklet-girt feet (in their hearts). 34-5

Maanickavaacagar has now shed all fear. It is true that Saint Tirunaavukkarasu sings: “We are not subjects of anyone, the Lord of Death we do not fear”, but Maanickavaacagar’s fearlessness has one fear left. Tiruvalluvar says :

Not to fear that which ought to be feared is folly : To fear that which has to be feared is the characteristic of knowledgeable men.

So, Maanickavaacagar sings in the ‘Decad of Fear’ of what he fears, of what you and I should fear. He sings :

The gory mighty lance I do not fear ;
 The glance through the corner of the eye
 Of bangled women I do not fear ;

But if we see the loveless ones
 Who do not adore my Uncut Gem -
 Who dances on the stage of my heart -
 And drink in His grace,
 All the while gazing on Him,
 With all their bones melting away,
 Ah me ! that is when we should tremble in fear. 35-3

All fear of being forsaken has been shed. Now, he can boldly invite us to share in the grace of God. And he does so in these words in the next decad, the 36th, the Decad of Tiruppaandi.

Well in advance of your time,
 Love God and be redeemed ;
 He, Whom the one who swallowed the world
 Or Brahma or the heaven-dwellers
 Can neither conceive nor approach,
 He, Who swallowed the poison, our Lord of Paandi,
 Is bestowing the contents of His principal treasury
 On His devotees ;
 Come and rush forward to receive it. 36-5

He can very well invite us, for he has made a captive of the Lord Himself.

He sings of this capture, this apprehension of the Real, in great exultation in the Decad of Apprehension of the Godhead in the 37th Decad.

Oh Flame of Grace, Oh Fully Ripe Fruit,
 Oh King of a vast multitude of men of rare contemplation,
 Oh Art with a significance,
 Oh Pleasure past all praise,
 Oh Crown of contemplation,
 Oh Treasure that has entered the thoughts of the devotees

On their gaining clarity,
 Oh Civan, the Great Lord,
 In the dark place I have apprehended You securely :
 Where will You escape any more ? 37-4

This dark place in which Maanickavaacagar tells the Lord that he has caught hold of Him securely needs explaining. Not all my words can explain it as well as certain quotations from the *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Its unknown author says :

“Cease not, therefore, but labour on until you feel this hunger for God. The first time that you try, you will find only a darkness, as though it were a Cloud of Unknowing, which you do not understand, only that you feel in your will a naked intent unto God. Whatever you do, this darkness and this cloud is between you and your God, and keeps you back so that you may not see Him either by the reasoning of your intellect or feel Him in the affection of your heart. Therefore you will have no other course than to stay in this darkness in the best spirit that you can, always calling upon Him whom you desire. For if ever you are to see Him and feel Him (to the degree that it is possible here) it must always be in this Cloud and in this darkness. If you will continually struggle as I bid you, I trust that in His mercy you shall come to His love.

“Do not think because I call it a darkness or a cloud, that it is any cloud congealed out of the clouds that fly in the air, or any darkness such as is in your house when the candle is out. Such a cloud and such a darkness one can create out of the imagination and carry before him on the lightest day of summer, and also in the darkest winter one can imagine a clear

shining light. Leave such false images alone. I do not mean such for when I say darkness ; I mean a lack of knowing, such as those things that you do not know or have forgotten are in the darkness. In your present state you are not able to see with your spiritual eye. It is for this reason that it is not called a cloud of air, but a Cloud of Unknowing that is between you and your God."

In a book called 'Privy Counsel', the same author, instructing his disciple to empty his mind of all thoughts and images so that it may remain in supraconceptual darkness, says :

" Let that darkness be thy mirror and thy mind wholly ".

Fr. Johnston, explaining this sentence, says :

"The mind is a mirror ; void of images and thoughts, but filled with faith ; it is in darkness, and in the darkness one sees God". He continues :

"This darkness which wholly fills the mind when, void of discursive reasoning and conceptual thinking, it is grounded in supernatural faith, this darkness is the cloud of unknowing. And out of this darkness of faith there arises 'the blind stirring of love', also called 'the naked intent of the will', that darts upward (or more correctly downward) towards God who, by grace, is in secret and silence in that mysterious part of the soul that is called 'the sovereign point of the spirit. "

When Maanickavaacagar sings in line 89 of the first decad,

" Oh Lord who dances in the dense darkness "

and when he refers to the "dark place" in the Decad of Apprehension of the Godhead, he means this darkness

and not the darkness of ignorance or the darkness which envelopes the world on doomsday.

I have already explained how the *Jeevan-muktaa* state is equated in Saiva-Siddhaanthaa with the admission to the galaxy of devotees. Maanickavaacagar, who had already sung of this admission in the Decad of Wonderment (*athicaya-p-pathithu*), now sings of it again in the Decad of Miracle (*arrputha-p-pathithu*) thus :

Severing the bond of twin deeds
Which ever keeps swinging this body and soul
(between birth and death),
He, Who can rarely be intuited by those who attempt to intuit Him
through (high) sounding words,
Gave me experimental knowledge of Him,
And made me enlightened ;
And, severing the hold of the accretions called *paasam*,
Out of His lofty surpassingly great mercy
Fulfilled my desire and gathered me unto the feet of His devotees :
I cannot understand this miracle. 41-8

Maanickavaacagar commences the last journey with great eagerness and elation. He sings thus in the 45 decad, the Decad of the Pilgrimage, pilgrimage to the feet of the Lord.

Oh You who have been called up
By the Flood of Grace, our King
Whose head is profusely decked with flowers -
The mighty Lord with the snakes for ornaments -
The Flood of Grace which,
Unceasingly mingling with the heart of us paltry ones,
Dissolves it into experience,
Oh you who have been so called up
And have lovingly become His slaves, come and gather together ;
Behold the time has come to go—leaving the unreal—
And enter the haven of the feet of our Owner. 45-1

He does not go alone. He mobilises the army of devotees and wants them to advance on the heavenly city before the army of the powers of delusion takes them. In the Decad of Mobilisation of the Army, he calls together the army of devotees of the Lord thus :

Beat the cosmic-sound-emitting drum of our Chieftain
Who wields the sword of wisdom,
Hold aloft the moon-like white umbrella
Of our Chieftain who rides the most mighty bull ;
Don all of you the blessed armour of the sacred ash ;
Let us capture the heavenly city
Before the forces of delusion arrive. 46-1

Oh you servitors of the Lord,
Go forward as the vanguard, raising a cloud of dust ;
Oh devotees, march on the flanks ;
Oh Yogins of resplendent prowess,
March as the main mighty array ;
Oh Siddhaas of granite might, form the rear guard ;
We shall rule over the land of the dwellers of the spheres,
And prevent the army of sorrow from approaching it. 46-2

Thus far only can we normally follow any saint in his ascension to heaven. But not so in the case of Maanickavaacagar. Probably, nowhere in the world's mystic literature, has anyone except Maanickavaacagar ever given any account of what *videhamukti*, life in God after death, will be like. This unique revelation is given in the 49th pathikam, the *Tiruppadaiaatchi*, the sub-heading to which is "the cessation of the travail of life". Duality ceases, Godhead alone remains. This vision of life after death was vouchsafed to Maanickavaacagar, and he, in his bounteous love for mankind, has left an account of it. He sings :

These two eyes shall no longer delight in the vision
 Of His anklet-girt feet ;
 My life shall not be degraded by association
 With the life of ensnaring women ;
 Even by oversight I shall not be reborn in this world ;
 Nor shall I any longer worship the twin feet
 Which Vishnu had never known ;
 Nor shall I indulge in song and dance
 Set to exhilarating tunes ;
 I shall no longer sing of the victories
 Of Him who has Paandiyanaadu for His domain ;
 No longer shall the mystic powers,
 Which the heaven-dwellers delight in,
 Exhibit themselves in me ;
 None of these shall be when the Divine Fisherman,
 Who of old cast the net, shall arise in me. 49-1

There remain the 50th and 51st decads to explain.
 The 50th decad is a swan's song, the last faint plea for
 death. No longer rebellious, but with utter submission
 to the divine will, Maanickavaacagar sings thus :

When is this wretch to join You Who enslaved me,
 Me, sans merit, sans disciplines,
 Sans ardour, sans wisdom,
 Me, who had been whirling round in a dance
 Like that of the puppet-show doll made of skin
 And now lies here exhausted ?
 When is this wretch to join You who enslaved me
 By showing me how to get God - intoxicated,
 By showing me the way to reach you,
 By showing me Your form, that I may ascend the path
 To the land from which there is no return. 50-3

The last decad of *The Tiruvaacagam*, the 51st, the *Achchopathikam*, the Decad of Amazement, is a decad of thanksgiving. It is an epilogue to *The Tiruvaacagam*. All the songs end with the refrain :

Who else indeed can gain the privilege
Which my Father in His gra^{te} granted me ? ”

He sings :

Teaching the path of devotion to me,
Who was laboriously striving
In the company of cussed men
Who did not know the way to liberation,
Ridding my mind of the original taint
That my ancient karma may cease to be,
And transforming me into bliss,
My Father assumed lordship over me ;
Who else indeed could gain such a privilege
Which my Father in His grace vouchsafed me ? 51-1

Thus ends *The Tiruvaacagam*, the great manual of mystic theology, the paean of rapturous songs, the greatest love-drama on earth, the story of the human bride and the divine bridegroom.

Tradition has it that Maanickavaacagar was asked by some earnest enquirers the meaning of his monumental work. It is said that he took them along with him to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple at Thillai and, pointing to Lord Civan enshrined therein, dissolved into the Effulgence therein, — the same Effulgencee which he has addressed adoringly in scores of places in his work.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE.

The reader would have come across in the previous pages references to *Vishnu* and *Brahmaa* which, on the surface, appear derogatory to them, and which, in the case of *Vishnu*, seem likely to offend the susceptibilities of a certain sect of The Hindu community. My Guru had explained to me on several occasions the true import of such references. Recently, when I met him, he graciously gave me a written note in Tamil, which I reproduce here in English. He says :

“ It is clear that the four Fathers of religion (*samaya kuravars*) who have graciously uttered the Tamil Vedaas — *The Thevaaram* and *The Tiruvaacagam* — have uttered those sacred texts during their last and final birth which is the birth which will not lead to any further birth. Since these texts have been uttered by them in the *jeewan-muktaa* state and with unworldly objective, there is neither any future birth nor worldly enjoyment (*bhogam*) for them. In a state in which a soul has been freed from *Brahmaa*’s creative power and *Vishnu*’s protective grace, the obligation to worship such deities has also disappeared. Creating and sustaining are, of course, indivisible aspects of the Godhead. But these are aspects which merge (and disappear) in the *Mahaasamharaa*, the great obliteration of the Universe. The crores of souls yet due for deliverance reemerge from this obliteration. Reincarnation and worldly enjoyment are intertwined factors. Those in whose case there is no chance of these two incidents recurring, they are the *jeewan-muktaas* who have attained the transcendental state. They are great souls which are obliged to remain in the human body till the *videhamukti* state, the disembodied state, eternal deliverance, is gained. They are those who have to spend their last days awaiting the fifth of the quintuple acts, the conferment of grace by

the *mahaasamhaara* Causationist, the Godhead, who bestows transcendental bliss. In this interim period of life in the world, if, through some mischance, desire for worldly enjoyment arises in them as a result of a sense of me and mine, they would come again under the powers of creation and protection of Brahmaa and Vishnu. These references are, therefore, sacred utterances by such souls in the context of praying to the Godhead to prevent them from falling under the power of the creative and protective aspects of the Godhead, and to, moreover, protect them from being assailed by Brahmaa and Vishnu, the presiding deities over such aspects of the Godhead."

In line 7 of decad 3, Maanickavaacagar speaks of "the hordes of Brahmaas and multitudes of Vishnu". It is clear from this that Maanickavaacagar did not have in mind the Vishnu, the transcendental Godhead of the Vaishnavites. It is inevitable and unavoidable, however, that, in such references to Brahmaa and Vishnu, the puraanic lore should creep in. But it should be ignored or construed in the light of the above interpretation of my esteemed Guru.

1. CIVAPURĀANAM

The Civapuraanam is a poem in the nature of a prologue. In Tamil, it is called *tharrchirappu-p-paayiram*. It is, nevertheless, much more than that. The poem is a definition of the Godhead, the Brahman; it is at the same time an autobiographical account of the author's personal apprehension of the Godhead, an account which relates with gratefulness and exultation the multifaced aspects of the author's relationship with the Godhead. Lines 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 17, 21, 32 to 40, 50 to 61, 65, 69, 74, 78, 82, 83, 84 to 88, 89, 90 are relevant. The reader is requested to meditate on these passages.

There is only one supplication in the whole poem. It is contained in line 43.

The lines are numbered in this and the next three decads according to the original. When a line of the original occupies more than one line in the translation, the second and following lines are printed with an indentation of one em. As far as possible, attempt has been made to translate each line separately, but, sometimes, for the sake of clarity and continuity of thought, two or more lines have been translated together. In such cases, reference to those lines is given at the end of such a passage of translation, as for example, lines 33, 34. Ordinarily, every fifth line only is given a number. However, whenever there is a note to any particular line, that line is also numbered. The notes at the foot of the pages begin with reference to the number of the line concerned.

The reader is earnestly requested to read the notes without fail.

Words within brackets in the translation are added by the translator to ensure clarity.

1. CIVAPURAAANAM

(Beginningless Ancientry of Civan) *

INVOCATION **

Hallowed be Namachchivaya, Your name !

Hallowed be the feet of Naadhan ! † 1

Hallowed be the feet of Him Who never departs
from my heart even for as long as it takes to wink! 2

* 'Beginningless Ancientry of Civan' - This and other similar sub-titles to the various decads have been given by some unknown ancient commentator of great mystic and spiritual advancement. They give the quintessence of the decads.

** The words 'INVOCATION' and others such as 'DECLARATION OF PURPOSE' etc., are inserted by the translator to elucidate the structure of this decad.

† Whenever a line of the original exceeds a line in the translation, the extra line or lines are printed with an indentation of one em to the right.

1. i. The terms 'Namachchivaaya' and 'Naadhan' have been advisedly left untranslated in the translation, since they are proper names. 'Namachchivaaya' is the personified form of the mystic five letters, Na ma ci vaa ya. It stands as a name for the Godhead, the Brahman. Similarly, 'Naadhan' is personification of Naadham, the cosmic sound, the Onkaaram, i. e., OM, and is again a name for the Godhead.

1. ii. The feet referred to in this line and elsewhere in *The Tiruvaacagam* are not the anatomical organs of an anthropological God. In the words of St. Tirunaavukkarasar, the feet of the Lord are the knowledge gained by learning, the content of that knowledge, the resonant Vedaas of the brahmins, the sacrifices, heaven and earth, the effulgent light, the golden sun, the moon, the beginning and end of everything. Also refer to stanza 20 of decad 7.

2. i. 'Him Who never departs from my heart' - Whether man realises it or not, God ever resides in his heart as well during his dark period of ignorance as during his period of enlightenment. Later on,

Hallowed be the feet of the precious gem of a Guru,
Who in Kohazhi assumed lordship over me ! 3

Hailowed be the feet of Him, Who, in the guise of the Aagamaas,
Stands close (to beings and pours grace on them) ! 4

Hallowed be the feet of the One, the Many, the immanent ! 5
Let the feet of the King, ●

in stanza 37 of the 5th decad, our sage, addressing God, says: "it is not Your divine will to ever part from this cur by even the (least) part of (the length of) a millet seed." Aldous Huxley, in his *Perennial Philosophy*, says: "It is because we don't know who we are, because we are unaware that the Kingdom of God is within us, that we behave in the generally silly, the often insane, the sometimes criminal ways that are so characteristically human. We are saved, we are liberated and enlightened, by perceiving the hitherto unperceived good that is already within us, by returning to our eternal Ground, and remaining where, without knowing it, we have always been." The Mundaka Upanishad (II, 2-i & vi) says: "The self-luminous (Brahman) is seated in the cavity of the heart and is known as moving there Lives there within, in manifold ways, where the arteries of the body are brought together like the spokes in the centre of a wheel; within it (this Aatman moves about) becoming manifold. Do you meditate upon that Aatman as Om." The Chandhogya Upanishad (VIII. 1-i) says: "Now, here in this city of Brahman (*the human body*) is an abode, a small lotus flower; within it is a small space. What is within that should be sought, for that, assuredly, is what one should desire to understand."

2. ii. 'for even as long as it takes to wink' - this is one of the least units of time according to *Tholkappiyam*, the ancient Tamil grammar. It says: "The time taken for winking the eye, or for snapping the fingers, is a unit of sound, say the linguists."

3. 'Kohazhi' — Ko = the great, kazhi = port. Some commentators say that the reference is to Tiruvaavaduthurai, the seat of a Saiva monastery today. Others say that Tirupperunthurai and Kohazhi are the same.

4. 'Aagamaa' - scriptures parallel to the Vedaas dealing with pure gnosis. The Aagamaas extant today are not, in the opinion of the commentators, the ones referred to herein.

Who stilled the tumult (of my mind)
And assumed lordship over me, prevail
(over all my failings). 6

Let the tinkling anklet-girt feet of Him with the hairdo,
Who cuts down (the tree of my cycle of births) prevail ! 7

Let the anklet - girt flower - like (soft) feet of Him,
Who is remote from those who stay outside His pale, prevail.

Let the anklet - girt feet of Him Who delights (to stay)
in the hearts of those who join their palms (in worship) prevail.

Let the anklet-girt feet of the Magnificent One,
Who ennobles those who bow down their heads, prevail. 10

Obeisance to Eesaa's feet ! Obeisance to my Father's feet ! 11

Obeisance to the feet of the Effulgent One !
Obeisance to Civan's rosy feet !

Obeisance to the feet of the Immaculate One
Who is manifest in the love (of His devotees) !

Obeisance to the feet of the King
Who severs delusion-bringing births !

Obeisance to the feet of our Lord
of grandeur-invested Perunthurai ! 15

Obeisance to the Mountain
Which graciously confers unsatiating bliss ! 16

6. 'prevail' — gain victory. Please add 'over all my failings' after the word 'prevail' in lines 7, 8, 9, 10 as well.

7. 'hairdo' — it comprises the matted hair, the Ganges, the crescent moon and the snake hidden in the coils of the matted hair.

11. 'Eesaa' — the Lord Who pervades all the universe.

15. Perunthurai — There is no such place in Tamilnaadu today. Aavadaiaarkoil of modern times is identified by scholars and devotees as Perunthurai of old.

16. 'Mountain' — symbol of permanency. It stands for the eternal nature of the Godhead.

DECLARATION OF PURPOSE

Since He, Civan, the Supreme Bliss, abides in my mind, 17
 By His grace, worshipping His feet,
 The Civapuraanam, to the delight of my mind
 And the effacement of all my past karma, shall I relate. 20

SELF-DISPARAGEMENT IN MODESTY & HUMILITY

On the One with an eye in His forehead,
 With His gracious glance, beckoning me,
 I, coming nigh,
 Those beyond reach of thought notable feet worshiped.

17. 'Supreme Bliss' — Maanickavaacagar refers here to the state which the 12th and last verse of the Maandookya Upanishad propounds. It reads: "The transcendental, unitary state of supreme bliss, devoid of phenomenal existence is the syllableless fourth (aspect); thus Om is verily the Aatman. By self, he enters the Self, who knows thus." The word 'Civan' in our text is, therefore, to be translated as 'supreme bliss' i. e., Om. Here is an echo of the thought of the second line of this decad.

20. Karma, or, to be more precise, fruits of karma, i. e., of deeds good and bad, go on accumulating birth to birth. It is like a savings bank account. When a man is born, he brings with him a part of the stored karma, even as he would take a part of the money in his bank account when he goes on a journey. This is called 'praarabda karma', and, whosoever it may be, be he sinner or saint, he shall have to go through the experience of the fruits of this karma. So long as a man lives his life with desire for the fruits of his actions, he earns a new store of karma. This is called *aagamya karma*, i. e., accruing karma. This is added to the store of karma which has been left behind. That store is called the *sanchita karma*. A life lived without desire for the fruits of action, a life of total surrender of one's body and soul and possessions as well to God ceases to earn any new karma. Moreover, that type of life liquidates the balance left behind, the *sanchita karma*. Thus, such a person becomes a released soul, released from the bonds of the cycle of births. In line 20, our sage means this type of emancipation.

Oh Lord, Who, filling the sky and the earth and more too,
 Is enlightening Effulgence to me,
 Oh You Who are beyond assessment and without bounds,
 Your great glory,
 I of evil karma, to praise, not a single thing do I know. 25
 As grass, shrub, worm, tree, 26
 As full many a kind of beast, bird, snake,
 As stone, man, goblin, demons, 28
 As mighty giants, ascetics, devaas,
 In the prevalent world of mobiles and immobiles, 30

25 Place this line alongside of line 32 and meditate on them along with these verses (II. i to iii) of the Kena Upanishad :

Disciple (after reflecting further and realising Brahman) :

"I think I have understood Brahman."

I do not think that I know it well ; nor do I think that I know it not.

He among us knows It truly who knows this, viz., nor do I know that I know It not.

Preceptor : "To whomsoever It is not known, to him It is known ; to whomsoever It is known, he does not know. It is not understood by those who understand It; It is understood by those who do not understand It"

26 to 32. compare these lines with the following passage from Jalal-ud-din Rumi, a 13th century Persian mystic.

"I died as mineral and became a plant,
 I died as plant and rose to animal,
 I died as animal and I was Man.
 Why should I fear ? When was I less by dying ?
 Yet once more I shall die as man, to soar
 With angels blest ; but even from angelhood
 I must pass on : all except God doth perish.
 When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,
 I shall become what no mind ever conceived.
 Oh, let me not exist ! for Non-existence
 Proclaims in organ tones, 'To Him we shall return'.

28. 'goblin, demons' — these are servitors of Civan.

Oh Noble Lord, I have been born in every kind of
birth, and am wearied ;

Oh Reality! Your golden feet I saw this day and
deliverance from birth gained ! 32

PREAMBLE TO SUPPLICATION

That I may be redeemed, Oh Truth, Oh Immaculate One,
Oh Rider astride Om, Who stood established in my mind
as Onkhaaraa, and Who, while the Vedaas 33-34

Wail, 'Oh Sire', rises to the zenith, penetrates to the
nadir and extends to all sides (of my heart) (as the)
Subtile One ! 35

32. 'Reality' — as opposed to delusive births, (see also line 14). All the commentators except Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiyar take lines 26 to 31 as one unit, and exclude line 32 which they tag on to line 33 et seq. I prefer to link this line with lines 26 to 31 as it rounds off the sense of the previous six lines in a remarkably significant manner, besides agreeing, may I add, with the import of the passage quoted from Jalal-ud-din Rumi in the notes to lines 26 to 32. Furthermore, all the commentators construe 'meyye', the first word of line 32 as 'truly', 'in truth' or 'forsooth'. But when the 32nd line is taken as extension and conclusion of the idea in the foregoing lines, then, it has to be translated as 'Reality' This is how I have been taught.

33—34. i. 'Oh Rider astride Om' — the phrase in the original, 'vidai-p-paahaa', means literally, 'the bull's mahout'. 'Vidai' is however, translated by me as 'Om' after Taittiriya Upanishad's phrase (I. 4. i) *chandasaam rshabo*. Swami Shravananda of the Ramakrishna Mutt, commenting on this word in an extensive and exhaustive note, observes as follows : "The epithet 'rshaba', according to the traditional advaitic interpretation, refers to 'Om', the symbol and designation of Brahman."

33—34. ii. 'Onkhaaraa' — the mystic syllable 'Om'.

35. I have inserted the phrase 'of the heart' in this passage as this must be the place in which this phenomenon happens. The word *nunniyane* (subtile one) can but mean this only. My interpretation is supported by the Chandhogya Upanished verses (VIII. 1. i to iii) which read :

Oh Fiery One, Oh Cool One,
 Oh Master of Ceremonies in *yagnyaas*,
 Oh Immaculate One !

36

Oh Flame of the Real Who coming in Your grace,
 that all unreality in me may dispelled be,
 scintillates in me as Gnosis of the Real !

37, 38

Oh Blissful Noble Lord, Oh Preëminent Wisdom,
 Who dispels the ignorance of me
 who has no knowledge of any kind whatsoever ;

39, 40

“Now, here in this city of Brahman (the human body) is an abode, a small lotus flower ; within it is a small space. What is within that should be sought, for that, assuredly, is what one should desire to understand.

“ If they should say to him, with regard to this city of Brahman and the abode and the small lotus flower and the small space within that, what is there that should be sought for, or that, assuredly, one should desire to understand ?

“ He would say: ‘ as far, verily, as this (world) space extends, so far extends the space within the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth. both fire and water, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars. Whatever there is of Him in this world and whatever is not, all that is contained within it. ”

36. i. ‘Oh Fiery One, Oh Cool One,’ – the reference is to the masculine and feminine elements of the Godhead, to Civan and Sakti, to Ammal-appan (Father-mother).

36. ii. ‘Master of Ceremonies’ – of the *aatma-yagnya*, the surrender of the soul, the dying to self by the devotee. See verses 6 to 9 of decad 33.

37 to 43. Students of the Upanishads will be delighted to note the correspondence between these lines and the *Brahadaranyaka Upanishad*’s famous lines :

From the unreal lead me to the Real,
 From darkness lead me to Light,
 From death lead me to Immortality.

What is a prayer in the Upanishad appears here as the fulfilment thereof.

Oh You Who are not created, and have no life-span or end,
Who create, sustain, destroy and bestow grace, 41, 42

THE SUPPLICATION

Rid me (of this cycle of births)
and induct me into the fold of Your devotees. 43.

LAUDATORY THANKSGIVING

Oh You (Who are in me) like fragrance (in flowers),
Oh Far One, Oh Near One ! 44

Oh Content of the Vedaas Who is beyond speech and
the mind !

Oh our Noble Lord Who, like freshly drawn milk
mixed with sugar-candy and honey, 46

Preeminently stands, oozing honey,
in the thoughts of Your devotees, 47

43. Commentators construe 'pokkuvaai', the first word in line 43 as 'send me down to earth to be born again'. But this does not seem to be in consonance either with the spirit of the supplication or with the 3rd line of the parallel passage quoted above from the Upanishads. For the significance of this supplication, please see the interpretation on pages 65 to 69.

44. i. 'like fragrance in flowers', which is latent in buds and is diffusive in full-blown flowers, God is in ignorance bound souls and enlightened souls respectively. In Tamil tradition, mystics and saints are said to diffuse divine fragrance.

44. ii. 'Far One, Near One' — compare with lines 8, 9, & 10.

46, 47. In translating these lines, I have, rather reluctantly, followed the commentators all of whom interpret the lines as they now stand in the translation. I would, however, prefer to render them as follows :

"Oh our Noble Lord Who, like sweetness and butter (inseparably and imperceptibly) mingled in freshly drawn milk, preeminently stands (immanent), oozing honey, in the thoughts of Your devotees, "

And severs the cycle of births
 with the birth they have now taken ;
 Five colours You have ;
 while the heaven-dwellers lauded You, 49
 You remained hidden from them.
 (On the other hand), Oh my Lord,
 for the sake of me of potent karma, 50
 Whose real-self hiding delusive ignorance
 Is bound with the remarkable rope of good and evil (deeds),
 And is wrapped all over with an external skin
 to hide the worm-infested grime,
 And which nine-outletted
 foul excreta - dripping dwelling,
 To its bewilderment, the five senses were seducing, 55
 For the sake of such a me, who, Oh Immaculate One,
 was, due to a thwarting mind,
 Devoid of the grace of merging in You with love
 and of thawing and melting within my (stony) heart,
 You graciously came down on earth
 and showed Your far-famed feet 59
 To me, Your slave, fallen lowlier than a cur, 60
 Oh Truth with tenderness surpassing a mother's.

49. 'Five colours' - the five elements - earth, water, fire, wind and ether - have been assigned in Hindu metaphysics golden, white, red, black and grey (smoky) colours respectively. As God is immanent in the five elements, their colours are ascribed to Him also. Another interpretation is that the colours refer to the respective colours of the five faces, viz., *Eesaanam*, *Tatpurusham*, *Agoram*, *Vaamadevam* and *Sadyojaatam*, ascribed to the Godhead when He is conceived as *Sadaacivam*. The colours in this case are crystalline (smoky), golden, black, red and white respectively.

59. This line refers to Civan coming as a Guru at Perunthurai to redeem Maanickavacagar and enslave him.

PAEAN TO THE GODHEAD

- Oh Spotless Effulgence Who blossomed (in my heart)
as a (multi-) petalled flame !
- Oh my Guru, Honied Ambrosia, Lord of Civapuram ! 63
- Oh Eminent One Who severs the hold of *paasam* 64
and nurtures me.
- Oh Mighty River of abounding grace,
Who, exercising amiable grace,
stands unmovingly in my heart
to the detriment of the wile therein ! 65, 66
- Unsatiating Ambrosia, Measureless Mighty One !
- Oh Light which lies latent in the hearts of those
who do not contemplate on You ! 68
- Oh You Who melted me (stony-hearted creature) into water
and stood established in me verily as my dear life !
- Oh You Who have not and yet have joy and sorrow ! 70
- Lover to those who love You ! Oh everything and nothing ! 71

63. 'Civapuram' ~ the human body, the Brahmapuram of the Chandhogya Upanishad. See note to line 35.

64. *paasam* - the three *malams* i.e., the three taints of *aanavam*, *kanmam*, *maayai*, - ignorance, the twin deeds of good and evil, and the matrix of all the five elements. *Paasam*, like *Pathi* (God) and *pasu* (the soul), is according to Saiva Siddhaanthaa, eternal without beginning or end. It is a dogma of Saiva Siddhaanthaa that all souls, in their unembodied state, are tainted by these three *malams*, and that God, in His abounding grace, endows the soul with a body that it may be rid of these taints and merge in Him in eternal rest and bliss. See also lines 111 and 112 of 2nd decad.

68. See note to line 2.

70. The Godhead has neither joy nor sorrow. But God grieves for His devotees and rejoices for them.

71. 'everything and nothing' - compare with last line of stanza 7 of decad 22.

Oh Effulgence ! Oh Dense Darkness !

Oh the One with the distinction of having no birth ! 72

Oh Beginning ; Oh End ; Oh Middle ! Oh none of these ! 73

Oh my Father and Noble Lord Who pulled me (unto You)
and assumed lordship over me !

Oh Rare-to-be-viewed Vision in the conception of those
who intuit with one pointed true gnosis !

Oh Subtlest of Subtle Experience ! 75, 76

Oh Pure One without going or coming or commingling ! 77

Oh our Safeguarding Watchman ! Oh Ungazable Blazing
Light !

Oh Flood-stream of Bliss ! Oh my Father !

Oh much more than that !

Oh Clarity ! Oh Quintessence of Clarity,

Who, as the light of a flame of stable aspect

and as ineffable subtle Experience,

coming in the form of diverse things in this changing world,

becomes Gnosis ! 80 to 82

71, 72. Rev. Fr. Johnston, the author of *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, writes as the first sentence of his book thus : "In East and West the language of the mystics is full of paradox. Concepts of "light" and "darkness", "vision" and "blindness", "all" and "nothing" keep recurring with a frequency that is sometimes bewildering. The author of the *Cloud*, then, is true to type in constantly playing on the paradoxical theme of "knowing" and "unknowing". Towards the end of the *Cloud*, he strikes the keynote of his message with an appeal to Dionysius : And therefore St. Denis said : 'The most godly knowing of God is that which is known by unknowing. We know God, yet we do not know Him ; we know Him by unknowing ; we know Him in darkness ; we know Him by love.'"

72. God is never born ; He is called *Thaan-thondri, sui generis*. He is the cause of birth of all creatures.

73. compare with stanza 20 of decad 7.

77. the transcendent nature of the Godhead is referred to here.

Oh Unsatiab! Spring of Ambrosia in my thoughts !	
Oh my Liege-lord !	83
Oh You Who are capable of destroying	
the dwelling of the wily senses, so that those (devotees),	
who, saluting and praising You constantly,	
and crying :	
“ We can no longer bear to remain in this carnal body,	
subject to various vicissitudes, Oh Sire, Oh Hara,”	
have, shedding unreality, become Reality,	
may not come here (on earth) once again	
and get entangled in karmic birth !	84 to 88
Oh Naadhan stepping a dance in the dense darkness !	89
Oh Dancer in Thillai !	
Oh Lord of Paandinaadu in the south !	90

89. i. Naadhan — see note to line 1.

89. ii. ‘dense darkness’ — see paragraphs commencing with the words, “This dark place” on page 81 and ending with the words, “point of the spirit.” on page 82.

90. The translator ventures to think that the ‘Thillai’ referred to in this line is not the town in the South Arcot district of Tamilnaadu. On the other hand, he thinks that it is the place where the intellect merges according to the Kathaa Upanishad (verse III. 13) which reads :

“The wise should merge the speech in the mind and that (mind) in the intellect, the intellect in the Great Self and that (Great Self) in the Shaantaatman.”

“The soul”, explains Dr. Radhakrishnan, “must go beyond all images in the mind, all workings of the intellect, and, by the process of abstraction, the soul is wrapt above itself and flows into God in whom are peace and fulness.” “‘Purusha’ answers to the Shaantaatman,” explains Dr. Radhakrishnan.

The translator considers that the word ‘Thillai’ is a compound of two syllables, ‘dheehi’ and ‘laya’ on the analogy of ‘ellai’, i.e. ‘el’ meaning light and ‘laya’ meaning extinction, the whole meaning of the word being ‘the place where the light disappears’ i.e., the horizon; which, to the primitive man, was the boundary. Similarly ‘Thillai’ means the place where the intellect (dheehi) merges (laya).

The indwellers in Civapuram (the body),
 who, saluting You, the ineffable One,
 as 'He Who severs the affliction of birth',
 repeat the aforesaid song with apprehension of its
 Subject,
 will go beneath the feet of Civan,
 while all those around them humbly adore them.

91 to 95

91 to 95. these lines are in the nature of a *pala-sruti*, pronouncement on the fruits of chanting this poem with full grasp of its meaning and with apprehension of its subject, viz., the Godhead.

Index to Poems Translated in this Book.

Decad. Stanza	Line From To	Beginning word Ending word	Page
1	Complete	நமச்சிவாய பணிந்து.	
2 —	55 64	யாவரும்.....காண்க	3
2 —	100 124	மந்திர.....அருண்மலையாகவும்	74
2 —	127 128	நாயினேனை.....ஒழித்தருளி	76
3 —	19 28	நாள் தொறும் பிறவும்	22
3 —	124 145	மரகதக்...என்றவர்...ஒளித்தும்	34
3 —	146 156	தன்னேர் ஆற்றேனாக	10
3 —	163 182	சொல்லுவது...பெற்றியோனே	64
4 —	42 86	தெய்வம் வளர்த்தனை	10
4 —	223 225	போற்றி போற்றி	22
5 11		நாடகத்தால்	12
5 18		அரியானே	26
5 90		யானே பொய்	26
5 93		பொருத்தம்	27
5 94		இல்லை	26
6 18		இருந்தென்னை	14
6 48		தாரகை	28
6 49		சிரிப்பிப்பன்	28
6 50		ஏசினும்	28
7 1		ஆதியும்	39
7 10		பாதாளம்	44
8 9		துண்டப்	46
9 20		வேதமும்	47
10 4		கண்ணப்பன்	47
10 18		தோலும்	75
11 2		திருவார்	48
11 12		முத்திக்கு	32
12 1		பூசுவதும்	49
13 9		பன்னாள்	50
14 2		ஈரம்பு	50
15 8		மானம்	51

15	14	உரைமாண்ட	52
16	4	நஞ்சமர்	52
17	3	நித்தமனாளர்	53
18	4	தேன்பழச்	53
19	1	ஏரார்	54
20	7	அதுபழச்	55
21	1	உடையாள்	56
22	7	இன்றெனக்கு	57
22	10	தந்தது	57
23	2	புற்றுமாய்	32
25	3	சீவார்ந்து	71
26	8	நீக்கி	66
27	1	சுடர்	72
28	1	பாரொடு	72
29	1	சோதியே	73
30	1	பிணக்கிலாத	74
31	3	உருத்தெரியா	76
33	6	வேண்டத்தக்கது	77
33	7	அன்றே	2, 77
33	8	நாயிற்	13, 78
33	9	கண்ணார்	14, 78
34	5	பற்றுங்கவை	79
35	3	வன்புலால்	79
36	5	காலமுண்டாக	80
37	4	அருளுடைச்	80
38	10	நானேயோ	5
41	8	ஊசலாட்டும்	83
45	1	பூவார்	83
46	1	ஞானவாள்	84
46	2	தொண்டர் காள்	84
49	1	கண்களிரண்டும்	85
50	3	சீலமின்றி	85
51	1	முத்திநெறி	86